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Edited by

DAVID MARCUS

and

TERENCE SMITH

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DAVID MARCUS and TERENCE SMITH

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PATRICIA LYNCH

THE CAVE OF THE SEALS

PETER MacSWEENEY, the fisherman, lived in a little stone house at the head of the cove—Seal Cove they called it—though Peter had never set eyes on a seal since he had been there.

He had made steps down to the strand and, in a safe corner, above the highest of spring tides, he kept his black canvas curragh turned upside down. Peter put rocks around the boat to prevent it being blown over in a strong wind, for it was so light he could carry it on his back.

With only a dog for company, Peter often felt lonely. But now his young daughter Aideen, who had been in Dublin with her aunt and six cousins nearly all her life, had left school and was coming home.

"I've painted yer name in white on the boat," he told her, when he was up in Dublin. "It looks grand. But the house is terrible small."

"All the less to clean!" declared Aideen, who was going to keep house for the two of them.

"Many's the time I'll be away all night at the fishing and there'll be nothing but darkness outside and only the old dog to talk to," Peter warned her.

"Aunt Nan's giving me a kitten and, when darkness comes, I'll blow up the fire, light the lamp and read a book," promised Aideen. "How can I feel lonesome if I'm reading a story?"

Now she was on the strand with her father. He raked seaweed into a heap, a heavy tweed cap at the back of his head and his blue eyes sparkled with happiness.

The waves foamed over Aideen's bare feet as she raced along the hot sand. The wind tossed her soft brown hair and her thin cotton frock, while Peter leaned on his long-handled rake to watch her.

"If Scraw hand't four legs under him, ye'd have him bet, so ye would," he told her. "But come along now. I'm starved for me dinner! I'll carry this lot up later on."

Already Aideen's face was as brown as her eyes and hair. She ate twice as much as she had in Dublin and was so happy she woke up laughing. Peter could hear her singing as he put out the boat or went up the lane with the ass and cart to bring in turf.

But when Aideen looked seaward she was frightened at the empty white-tipped waves surging away and away until they met the sky.

She forgot the sea when she sat on a creepy by the driftwood fire banked with turf. Aideen had never seen such wonderful coloured flames in the coal fires at Aunt Nan's.

Every day the weather grew stormier and Aideen hated the wind. Every night it grew colder and Aideen shivered under the heavy bedclothes. Her thick coat and bright green muffler which had seemed so snug in Dublin couldn't keep out the bitter cold.

Sometimes at night she lay awake listening to the sea raging up the cove, sighing and crashing and throwing spray so high it tapped on the window pane. The wind howled in the chimney: a sea-bird called a long distance off, then nearer and nearer.

Aideen began to wish she was back at her aunt's.

"Wait till I find a bag of gold washed up on the strand," her father told her, as he piled salk-caked pieces of driftwood upon the fire. "Then I'll buy you a fur coat and lined boots and a great rug to tuck over your bed."

As he talked Aideen knew she could never go away from him.

"I don't feel very cold!" she declared. "And I'm getting used to the wind."

But when Peter pulled out his curragh and went off with the other men Aideen hugged the kitten and watched until the boats were only specks on the grey, angry sea.

One morning Peter was gone before Aideen was out of bed and when Aideen looked from the window there were no boats to be seen, only a few gulls swooping and soaring.

She had her breakfast and shared it with the dog, Scraw, and the kitten. Then she harnessed the brown donkey to the cart and drove to the village to buy candles and meal.

"I'll have dinner ready and the house tidy before daddy comes back," she said to herself.

While Aideen was busy on land, her father was speeding after the other boats. Most of them were bigger than his. Some had three or four men to row and cast the nets. Peter had to do everything himself.

A web of crimson and yellow seaweed went riding by. He reached out, thinking it would please Aideen. But the weed slipped through his fingers and the curragh swerved so suddenly, he had difficulty in bringing her round. He glanced up to see what the other fishermen were doing and discovered he was alone. There wasn't another boat in sight.

"That's mighty queer!" muttered Peter. "How could they get away so quickly? If a gale was blowing I'd understand. Still and all they're as well able to look after themselves as I am. I wish I knew what took them off in such a hurry without giving me a hail. 'Tisn't neighbourly and 'tisn't like them."

He rowed carefully for he knew how treacherous were the currents of this sea. Over to the left a circle of foam showed where Goat's Rock came near the surface. To the right a sudden spurt

of spray warned Peter of the sharp Wolves' Teeth.

"If there isn't a mist coming!" he thought, looking anxious, for he hated mist and feared it more than the worst gale.

Peter buttoned his coat and turned up his collar. In spite of the hard rowing, he felt cold and shivered. Now he used his oars only to keep the curragh steady for every moment the mist grew denser.

"Am I coming to Sheep's Island?" he wondered. "I'd get a catch of mackerel in spite of the fog. But if the current's taking me beyond the cliffs, 'twould be haddock. I heard they were along there."

A rock rose high before him. A turn of the oar and Peter found himself entering a small round harbour he had never seen before.

The mist was thinner here and the pale winter sunlight tinged it with gold.

"There's no harbour like this at Sheep's Island," he told himself. "And I can't be far beyond the cliffs."

Quite puzzled he shook his head. Peter could hear splashings and thumpings as if rocks were tumbling into the sea. Then he heard laughter and singing, and the clapping of hands.

Could the other boats have entered here?

There was a strange, wild sweetness in the singing. No fishermen sang like that. Who could the singers be?

Peter kept very quiet, but inch by inch edged the boat in as far as he could. Stepping ashore he lifted the curragh up to a rocky shelf.

He saw a narrow slit in the towering rocks and stepped through into a large cave.

Dim green light came from high above his head and glistening columns marched away into the distance. Dancing in and out among the columns were tall men and women with long floating hair, the colour of red and yellow seaweed. As they danced they sang, softly, dreamily—

Tired of storm and tossing wave,
Seek we the rocky island cave.
Here is music: here is song:
Here the happy hours are long.

Secret cave in rocky island,
Safe from hunter's gun or spear.
Here we rest: here we play:
Here we dance the hours away.
Fishers come not near our island:
Come not near, come not near!

"There's one nearer than you think," said Peter to himself as the echoes caught the voices and made a lovely harmony. "'Tis

the Cave of the Seals and I've found it! They're the Seal People!"

At first sight the fisherman couldn't see distinctly, but as his eyes grew used to the faint light, he saw the shoulders of each dancer were draped with a magnificent fur robe.

"If I could lay me hands on one, Aideen would never feel cold again!" he thought.

Peter was craning forward when he stepped on a piece of bladder-wrack. His feet went from under him and, with a startled shout, he shot down the cave among the dancers.

At once they dived into the water, wrapping the robes about them as they sprang.

One had to go without, for Peter's hand clutching for support, seized the thick fur and gripped tightly.

Splashing and calling to one another, the seal men and women swam from the cave. The fishermen, who had missed Peter's curragh, saw as the mist cleared, a school of seals bobbing in the sea below the cliffs.

"There'll be no fish today!" they said. "Peter's the knowledgeable man. He guessed!"

They sped homeward as a sudden squall sprang up and were thankful to reach harbour safely.

Peter, still holding the fur robe, had forgotten the other fishermen.

"Won't Aideen open her eyes when I bring this home to her!" he chuckled.

The robe was tugged. Looking down he saw a girl's face with reproachful brown eyes which reminded him of Aideen's, gazing up at him from the green water.

The white hand loosened its grip and slipped back. Peter couldn't be sure if the sigh he heard was from the robbed seal maiden or the waves swirling over the rocks.

Slowly he scrambled back to his curragh.

He thought he had been in the cave less than an hour, but the short winter day had ended and the moon was rising. The mist had been swept away and sudden gusts of wind lashed the sea.

Peter stowed the fur in the stern and lifted the curragh into the water. As he rowed he looked at the island, but in a few moments it was gone. Yet he could see as far as the cliffs and there was Shéep's Island black and white in the moonlight.

"The Island of the Seals comes and goes," he thought. "That's what they say, and they're right!"

He rowed his hardest for the curragh rolled and tossed instead of skimming over the surface. Hands clutched the sides and tried to drag it back. Again and again he feared it would be swamped. When at last he saw the lamp Aideen had put in the window Peter was tired out, cold and stiff.

He lifted the curragh into its corner, turned it upside down

and piled the rocks around. As he climbed the steps a shower of hail beat against him: he entered the snug little house, closed the door behind him and dropped thankfully into a chair.

The dinner Aideen had cooked hours earlier was keeping hot in the pot oven. The table was laid, the kettle filled and the little brown teapot sat on the hearth near the glowing turf.

Peter tiptoed into the slip of a room where Aideen lay sleeping. By the flickering light of the candle he carried, he could see tears on her cheek.

"The poor child was cold and lonely," he muttered, spreading the robe over her, then going back to the fire.

As he ate, the storm shook the cabin. Was it the wind wailing and tapping at the windows? Even with the bedclothes pulled over his head Peter heard that wailing and tapping.

He was chopping driftwood and piling it in the shed when Aideen came running out to him.

"Daddy! That lovely fur rug! I was so warm I didn't want to stir. Where did it come from?"

Luckily she didn't wait for an answer.

"I'll make a pot of stirabout without a single lump in it!" she called over her shoulder as she went indoors, the kitten under her arm and Scraw jumping beside her.

But when they were eating their breakfast she remembered the fur robe.

"Where did it come from, daddy?"

"That's a secret!" he told her.

"When I wrapped it round me," said Aideen, "it clung to my arms and snuggled up round my neck as if it grew there."

Peter was frightened. Suppose it turned the child into a seal!

Then he was ashamed of his folly.

"A nice old omadhaun I am," he thought.

"Daddy! Couldn't you have it made into a coat?" asked Aideen. "Then I could wear it on Sundays and when we go up to Dublin."

Peter shook his head.

"It wouldn't look well for a poor fisherman's daughter to be wearing a fur coat," he said firmly. "People would wonder where it came from."

"Where did it come from?" persisted Aideen.

But he wouldn't tell her.

At night Aideen slept snug under the fur robe. She no longer heard the waves rushing up the cove or the seabirds wailing on the wind, voices calling and fingers tapping on door and window pane all night long. But Peter did!

Every morning when he went to the highest part of the cove to make sure if the curragh was safe and decide if he should go fishing he could see the smooth bobbing heads of the seals where no seals had been before.

"Yet this is Seal Cove. I wonder did this happen to some other fisherman? Ah sure, I'm turning foolish!" he told himself.

One night Peter sat at one side of the fire mending an old net. Aideen, her elbows on the table, read out a story from a book her aunt had given her.

The wind was high and the sea so wild not even the biggest boats could go out, so Peter listened comfortably to the crashing and roaring, thankful the cabin had a good roof and solid walls.

His fingers moved more and more slowly. Aideen stopped reading.

"Was that the wind tapping on the door, daddy?" asked Aideen.

"What else could it be?" demanded Peter.

"Did you hear someone call?" she whispered.

The fisherman tried to laugh.

"Wisha, child! Who'd be calling out there? 'Tis the wind, only the wind!"

A voice cried—

"I'm so cold, so cold!"

Aideen slipped from her chair and knelt on the floor at her father's feet.

"Daddy! Where did the fur rug come from?"

Peter told her about the Seal People and how they danced and sang in their cave.

While he was talking the calling and tapping ceased. But when he sang their song many voices from outside sang with him.

Then once again came that sad cry—"I'm so cold! I'm so cold!"

Aideen jumped up and went into her little room. She lifted the fur rug from her bed and came back with it.

"Open the window, daddy!" she said. "I can't let another girl freeze with the cold to keep me warm."

Peter opened the window and Aideen leaned out. Two white arms were raised towards her and she laid the soft fur in them.

She heard a great splash and a shower of foam rose into the air.

At once the wind dropped, the sea grew calm and in a silver river of moonlight Aideen and her father saw round heads bobbing out towards Seal Island.

Aideen was cold in bed that night, but the next morning when Peter went to his curragh he found it right side up and filled with the finest fish.

Indeed whenever the sea was too rough to go out he never bothered for the curragh was always filled for him.

And the fishermen in those parts say there never has been such fishing since the seals came back.

SEAMUS DE FAOITE

THE MORE WE ARE TOGETHER

THE brothers were the last two coopers left in that town. Other crafts were going: theirs was gone. Now they got a few pocket-warm shillings from farmers for repairing things they had made years ago. Mick, with a head full of reading at his beck (Shakespeare, Service and the Bible were all the one as long as they came under candle light without cost) was apt to dramatise their position. Charlie would tell him to have a bit of sense, if he would spare the words. The two lived together in the narrowest lane in that town, in a house so small that even undersized Mick looked big in it and Charlie looked like a heron in a hencoop.

Charlie looked like a heron anywhere. Long and lean and droop-nosed, eye-weary with boredom even in a pub, when he stood he drew one leg up till the flat of a thin sole against wall, bar or lamp-post braced the cushion of the calf for the right buttock: then his stubbled craw collapsed into a loop of neck band, hands dug into trouser pockets, elbows hugged the shelter of his withers, a Woodbine hung limp from his sad mouth like a sprat from the beak of the bird he resembled. He spoke when he had to speak, but mostly he used a high sweet whistle of a tune for ironic comment on things about him. Although he grudged life every step he gave to it he would walk any distance in the funeral of a man he liked. He was never known to walk in the funeral of a woman.

Mick was partial to women, but his square chunk of body on short legs and the music-hall humour of his face never prompted their love sense to sacrifice, and hard times to his trade estranged their sense of good business. In the wind-up he drew consolation from their nearness passing in the narrow lane. His small blue-bright eyes signalled his moods as far in daylight as a cat's eyes show at night. They told if he was liquored and ready for a spate on the passing away of the old stock, probing for doubtful beginnings to a new townsman or romancing about all the comely women who had loved and lost him up the laneway to Charlie.

The under half of the house was their workshop, its floor a good twelve inches above the cobbled lane level with whole generations of coopers' chips and shavings. In a deep poke of window in the back wall was a statue of Our Lady and a corkscrew. Over the workshop was the loft, where they slept on two beds in two whorls of old clothes. A ladder led to the loft and it was when Charlie was one night climbing the ladder that Mick first noticed he was having trouble with his left leg.

'What's up with you?' Mick asked.

'My leg,' Charlie gave back on two darts of a Woodbine.

'I know 'tis your leg, man,' said Mick.

'Then you know as much as I do,' said Charlie.

Lying on the doss that night Mick lighted a second pipeful of twist. The smoke plumed up out of murk to full whiteness in a splinter of moonlight from a chink in the slates. Charlie's head lay in the light, his face becalmed in sleep. The candle, stuck with its own grease to the bed above Mick's head, was not lighted that night for reading.

2

Down in the workshop in the morning, boiling a can of water in the oil stove, Mick talked up through the hole where the ladder reached the loft.

'Charleen! Charleen, I said!'

'I can't hear you,' said Charlie, half out of sleep.

'Why so, man?'

'I don't want to.'

'Why so, man?'

'Guess away.'

'Charleen! Charleen, I said!'

'Well?'

'What about the leg, Charleen?'

'What about the cup of tay?'

'Will you see a doctor?'

'In hell with the rest.'

'If I was you I would, man,' Mick ventured.

'You're not me,' said Charlie.

Mick jambed his hat down to an inch above his eyebrows. He allowed a pause, then tried again.

'Charleen! !'

'Go to hell.'

'About the leg.'

'That's what I mean.'

'I was looking at you last night . . . You were asleep. There was moonlight through the hole above my left ear slantin'. . . . You were pinned by the light like St. Paul near Damascus. . . . You made such a spittin' image of a corpse that I smoked half the night over it. . . . Maybe if you don't see a doctor we'll play the piece out in rale earnest—will you see a doctor?'

'No,' Charlie grunted at last.

'Then I'm as well layin' in the tobaccy and drink?'

'You're as well.'

'Then come down and wet your own bloody tay!' Mick shouted up through the hole.

But he thought of opening the door in time to see the women from Mass.

3

The leg got worse. Charlie's heron-perch against uprights

became as much necessity as the habit of years. Climbing the ladder was as difficult sober as ever it had been in drink. Mick heckled him from all angles without success. In time the night came when Charlie could not climb the ladder at all. He tried drawing himself up the stilts of the ladder with his arms. He failed because the old strength had all but left him. He crouched to sit on the third rung, lit a Woodbine and looked up to find Mick's shadow between him and the doorway of starlight. With the slightly swaying shadow had come the smell of drink. There was derision in the croon of Mick's voice when he spoke.

'Home is the sailor, home from the sea,' he quoted. 'Home for good an' all,' he added, circling a finger in the air towards Charlie.

'When the sailor can't climb the riggin' his sailin' days are done. He didn't make off the ould medicine chest in time. Or throw the bottle overboard in time. So now the stars will sail without him . . . and gulls will bring their cards to him a mile inshore.'

Charlie's strong tugs at the fag put little halos of warm light about his head that found his face unmoved.

'Tis a grand night for a man with two legs,' he said. Mick rocked, toppled and went out of sight to the shavings. 'If he could stand on 'em,' Charlie added.

From where Mick lay came a stirring of shavings, the jerk of a breath as he heaved himself to sitting, then the voice crooning: 'Joke away, Charleen, split the ould sides with choked laughin' at boozed Mick but remember. . . . Remember, Charleen, remember, my man, that Mick will be game ball in the mornin' . . .'

In a high sweet whistle Charlie began 'After The Ball Was Over'. Mick shook himself for the rattle of his matches. He lighted a match to find the pocket with his pipe. The match dropped from his hand and lit an oak chip. The chip flared and passed the flame to chips near it, all seasoned with years of shelter. In a minute there was a small steady blaze and the sweet smell of mellow wood burning. Hat askew, Mick gaped at the firm growing blaze. Of a sudden his eyes widened and brightened in the rising light with a wild, unuttered laughter. The quick jog of a thought enlivened the body. He tensed inside his loose hand-me-down clothes and rose to his feet to teeter about the workshop, grabbing and groping for bits and pieces of solid timber, piling them on the strengthening blaze from the floor. He began to shout wide-mouthed, snapping at the words with his stained teeth.

'I know now what we'll do, Captain. We'll burn the ould ship in dry dock, Captain, and go from sight and sound in a blaze of glory. No creepin' to death and crawlin' to graves for the last of the coopers. O Merciful God, that thought of this for us! O Merciful God, to save our face! We'll go out on our legs! Out on our legs we'll go, Charleen, and the stranger round us dazzled

by the blaze! Charleen, Captain, stand up and give me a hand with the glory, lend me a hand for the blazin' way home! ! Charleen! !'

Charlie never stirred. He lit a second smoke from the end of the first. By this time Mick's shadow was large on the wall, dancing with Mick who danced with the flames, his voice kindling with the rising heat into round after round of mad merriment, louder and stronger. In the middle of it all he thought of the oil stove. He unscrewed the cap of the oil container and flung paraffin to burst above the blaze into sickles of hissing flame.

'Climb!' he shouted. 'Climb to the roof, ye sweet bitches of flame. Climb! Burn! Burn and roast us out of here forever more! Charleen, come and stand with me, opposite them out we'll stand together and laugh! They thought they were great coming to take our town away from us and our living away from us and our *women* away from us! Charleen, come here and cock your game leg in their foolish bloody stranger faces—and we'll laugh! Laugh, Charleen!'

The flames were licking the boards of the loft when the first of the townspeople arrived with buckets of water from the lane pump. Mick raved and cursed and got in their way till they lifted him kicking out of the place. Out in the lane his ravings followed the bucket chain from pump to house and back again, over and over. They grew in abandon as the fire was gapped with water and thick shrouds of smoke wound about each dancing shape of flame. When the last flame fell under weight of water he stopped shouting. He went limp as if the fire had been a part of the demon in him. The small house hissed in its walls like a shower on sheet water and belched great clouds of smelling smoke through the doorway.

Suddenly Mick's body shuddered. It straightened itself quietly and slowly as with a long-drawn breath. Then suddenly his wide mouth opened full out and sharp as a dog's bark he cried—'Charleen!' He began to run towards the house thudding people right and left off his road and shouting—'Charleen!' But as he got to the house the heron-spare length of Charlie brought the game leg leisurely through the doorway. His clothes were sodden with flung water. His face and hands were as black as a sweep's. Mick blundered up, gripped his shoulders and shouted to his face as if it were up among the stars:—'Are you all right, Charleen? Are you all right, boy?'

'The least you might have done was to wet the cup of tay,' said Charlie.

4

They spent the night sitting by the hearth of the only old stock neighbour left to them: Mick drained of strength and sore for liquor, Charlie's sick bones craving heat through wet clothes from a fading fire. Charlie was still smoking when Mick nodded off in the small hours.

When Mick woke the first splink of cold dawn at the window showed him Charlie's long-drawn body limp in sleep over the chair. He had to fight an urge to listen for his brother's breathing. Sense arrived in time to remind him what Charlie would put into a few words if he opened an eye and found him fussing. Then memory had the firing antic ready for him: when he blasphemed a thick tongue disturbed the coat of wryness in his mouth. He went to grope for milk in the stale-smelling cupboard. He found enough to cool his mouth and leave a drop for the breakfast crust. Then he moved towards the door and tripped over a potato sack on the floor. He thought of a use for the sack: it would keep the dawn cold from Charlie's sick leg. He had the sack raised over the leg when a doubt about the depth of Charlie's sleep again unnerved him: Charlie could put a lot into a few words. A fire in the hearth would do, he thought. A timber cat-box of straw against the hob would kindle and spit sparks at a touch of a match. But Charlie would remember the last match he struck. Charlie might open an eye. Charlie could put a lot into a few words.

He stood over Charlie's face, grey and drawn in the white weak light, and glared down at it.

'If you die of the cold you can blame your own bloody self,' he hissed.

Then he went and raised the latch with care and let himself onto the narrow lane.

Going to the small house now was like easing his way back to a near one he had offended during a skite on whiskey: like nearing the mother's presence knowing he had broken the last of her marriage tea cups in a drunken tantrum. There was the silence, the meeting side-face, the waiting of each for a sign from the other that it was all in a life and could go to the dead day that brought it. But unlike the old mother the small house gave no sign. He felt that maybe it was whatever of the mother was left in the house that gave no sign. He told himself to hell with that too. Still he stood there between the night and day in the narrow place, looking lost, until full daylight sent the dregs of night away and the presence lifted from inside the walls. Then he chucked at the hat for courage and hummed his way into what was left of the workshop.

The carpet of chips and shavings had a great black hole in it. The steel of the tools lay in the hole, where bench and boxes and handles had left them in the fire. Metal hoops lay where the old barrel or firkin had been, or the tubs that farmers' wives had used to wash for the family or stall-feed a beast. Against one wall a hole was burned in the loft and a leg of Mick's bed stuck through. The ladder and Charlie had been farthest from the flames: the ladder still was there, leading to the loft. As he surveyed the damage a thought about the loft came to Mick. It

sent him searching till he located a handsaw. He gave a grunt of satisfaction that enough of the handle was there to grip it.

He took off his jacket and hung it on the door latch. First he cleared the litter from the floor onto the lane cobbles. Then he journeyed up and down the ladder until he had rid the loft of all on it, from the pair of beds to the ha'penny candle. That done he returned into the workshop with the saw.

Three spars of timber, embedded in the stone of the side walls, supported the loft. Because a board was missing on either side the spars were clear for sawing where they met the walls. Standing on the ladder he sawed the centre spar free. Next he sawed the spar-shanks in the opposite blind angles. The loft still held above his head. Then he tackled the shank in the angle opposite the open door. Here he had to be careful that the ladder braced the corner of the loft when the saw had cut through. He backed slowly towards the doorway, easing the ladder with its burden down the wall. The loft now listed above him. Only the corner near the door held a grip on the house. Bracing it in turn with the ladder he sawed it free. Then he stepped on to the lane and jerked the ladder through the doorway after him. The loft fell to the ground, and there and then was a floor of boards.

Straight away he reassembled the beds in the workshop and put the litter from the lane into order inside. That done he sat on his bed to wait for Charlie. But the day aged without Charlie's coming. Mick went and dogged the sunlight through hour after hour, from street to street, gable to gable: knowing Charlie's custom in an idle day. When the sun had set he searched the pubs: without result. Night came down in a drizzle of mist. Globules of the mist on the leaf of Mick's hat glistened in the lane gaslight as he returned to the shelter of the house.

He was in an hour before Charlie limped up the narrow way, the long body crow-black against the silver the gaslight made out of wet cobbles. When he stooped in at the doorway the quiet light of the ha'penny dip was all the welcome he got. Mick was stretched on his bed, the hat on his face, his bald crown airing. Charlie abandoned his exhaustion to the bed opposite and lit another fag. There was a long silence before Mick raised the hat off his mouth.

'Well?' he challenged.

'Well?' Charlie gave back.

'What the hell were you doin' all day?'

'Makin' up my mind to see a doctor,' said Charlie.

'And where were you all night?'

'Seein' wan.'

Mick lay quiet for a while. Then he tilted the hat off the near eye and fixed Charlie with a glare.

'What the hell did he say, man, what did he say, tell us that much!'

Charlie took his time. Mick's barrel chest filled with a long breath.

'That I'll not do a long journey on two legs, but I might go a bit farther on one,' said Charlie.

Mick let the breath out easy. He let the hat fall back on his face. There was another silence before he spoke from under it.

'Well, wan leg is better than no leg at all,' he said.

'I'd rather the short journey,' said Charlie.

'What do you mane?'

'When I lave I'll lave all in wan piece.'

'You must have it in your mind to lave early,' said Mick.

'All in wan piece,' Charlie repeated amicably.

Suddenly Mick jerked to a tailor squat on the heap of old clothes. The hat fell in his lap. Tufts of hair stood out over his temples. The whites of his eyes looked genuinely clean against dark stubble and the prickles of a black moustache. The eyes glared at Charlie.

'Why all in wan piece, tell me?'

''Tis what any wan of them would have done?'

'Who's them?'

'Your old stock.'

'Through bloody ignorance,' said Mick. 'I know the story backwards. Better die of what ails you than own it and admit it as a weakness in the blood. Ignorance, I say.'

'We're ignorant people,' said Charlie.

'Not all of us,' said Mick.

Charlie stretched his hand to make an arc of smoke with the Woodbine that for an instant linked the two beds.

'The half of what's left of us is,' he said.

'I won't argue with you,' said Mick. 'I'll spare my breath to blow froth, or whistle for a woman in a lonesome night.'

As another silence settled Charlie pierced it with a thin ironic whistle of a lovely air. The irony was in the beauty of his rendering. The tune was 'She moved through the fair' and Mick was caught in the imagery of its words: the young girl went from him through the country fair and away along a lakeside homeward under one star—until the irony went home to him and he hit back like a goaded animal.

'You're as ignorant as all the obstinate ould codgers that went before us,' he said.

'What do their ignorance matter to them now?' asked Charlie.

'It don't matter to them,' said Mick, 'but it do matter to us. They left us a legacy in a way of life it would puzzle a hermit to follow. Nothin' would do 'em but principle. They must have slept it, ate it and used it for firin'. Honesty was the best policy. A good day's work for a beggar's pay an' the rest was in the hands of the Good God Above. What did principle give 'em?'

'They could meet themselves in the mornin' shavin'?' Charlie answered.

'What did honesty give 'em?'

'Sleep of a night.'

'And from the hands of the Good God Above?'

'The five of trumps in the last card dealt.'

'Aye, but sometimes you'd wonder if there's damn all in the 'kitty',' growled Mick.

He rose, hat in hand, to pace the boards between the two beds. Suddenly he wheeled on Charlie.

'What I can't understand is why you feel you owe it to them to die sooner than you can help,' he said.

'What do extra time mean in the wind-up?' asked Charlie.

Mick gave the answer in a breath.

'A few times more to blow froth. A few times more to covet a young girl well made under the gloss of her white pelt. A few times more to tell the stranger to his face that he's no good.'

'A few times more to hold forth in praise of the old stock,' Charlie reminded.

'Oh, may God forgive me,' Mick prayed.

'As two of 'em we lived,' Charlie reminded.

'Tis time for a change,' Mick argued.

'Change before death,' smiled Charlie.

Mick jammed the hat on his head and flung open the door. The rain was falling fast and heavy now. It pounded the cobbles so that their silver leaped like a meshful of moonlit fish.

'O God, is it any wonder that sooner and later the sky has a leak on all the bloody world!' he called aloud into the lane.

5

The burning of the house brought problems they had not bargained for. Neither house nor workshop was insured. Property not theirs was burned and the code of their kind took for granted that the owners should be compensated. More customers were needed with tubs and firkins to mend.

They prepared by whittling handles for the damaged tools and edging the steel on whetstones wetted with spittle. The beds with their tatters were rolled against the back wall and hidden from callers with patchwork of old sacking on thick twine. In the new sleeping place the statue of Our Lady, cooed with untroubled dust as soft as moth wings, came into its own in time of candle light.

No further clients came their way. For four days the two appeared and disappeared through the parting in the canvas curtains, like two actors of the fit-up stage impatient for the arrival of an audience: Mick, a blubber-faced comic in trouble with remembering his lines, Charlie the tragedian rehearsing a limp and limbering a selection from his store of smiles. After that much waiting the comic downed tools.

'Charleen.'

'Well?'

'For all we'd know, stayin' here, the world might be dead.'

'Or we might be dead to the world,' said Charlie.

'Well either we or the world must find out, an' I see no sign of the world flockin' to the door,' Mick said. 'There's only three days to market day an' then the rustics will be in to moan over their few relics like they were gold. Be the holy, talkin' to their big fed bodies with their warm fat purses I feel like a corpse with the pennies on my lids. What'll we do at all?'

Charlie's answer was a whistle. The tune had run its course before Mick recognised it as a comment, and only then because in his mind the air was wedded to its words:—

'The more we are together, together, together,

The more we are together the merrier we will be:

For your friends are my friends

And my friends are your friends,

So the more we are together the merrier we will be.'

Mick flung his hat on the floor and kicked it.

'Put a string on the whistle,' he said. 'What'll we do about the long faces from the fields?'

'There's three days before us,' said Charlie.

'An' three centuries behind us that ended with the fire,' said Mick in a breath. 'Tis no use. Ah, can't you see 'tis no use. When the smell of the craft went out of the house the craft went with it and all the soul of the craftsmen, damned or saved, sad or merry. All they thought and felt and fought for, all they lived and hoped for, all the sport they ever had and all the memories of all they did at work or in drink: 'tis all gone now with the smell of the shavin's. An' the ghosts of their women rose in the smoke: all but my mother—an' she only delayed long enough to give me the back of her hand. By my soul, there in the middle of the new mornin' she gave me the cold creeps for burnin' the house.'

Charlie merely smiled.

'What'll we do about the rustic demand-notes?' Mick challenged.

'Sell the house,' said Charlie without a pause.

'Oh, then, begod, the mother will be back,' Mick said.

'Maybe she left the thought here before goin',' Charlie told him.

'Who'd buy it?' asked Mick.

'Them with shops in the street below.'

'For what use?'

'You should know that,' said Charlie.

'I never bothered my neck with home matters,' Mick defended himself.

'Stripped of their insides, houses like this are handy for stores,' Charlie explained.

'An' we can perch like a thrush on a hawthorn bush, I suppose?'

'We'll sell it on condition that it shelters us while we need shelter.'

'Will they buy it that way?'

'Half the houses in the lane are bought that way,' said Charlie.

6

'Come away!' said Mick, making for the door.

They got twenty pounds for the house. Five pounds satisfied the owners of the burned articles. Drink took the rest inside ten days. On the morning of the tenth day Charlie raised himself out of stupor, stood, swayed and fell face forward onto Mick's bed. Mick straightened him where he lay, listened at the sad mouth for breathing, felt for heart-beats in the big-boned vault of the chest. Satisfied that he was alive, Mick began to call in his ear and shake him at the shoulders, till Charlie stirred of his own accord. His eyes opened and humour gathered in them, taking time.

'I heard you over the way,' he told Mick.

'It must be wan hell of a distance,' Mick mumbled. 'How are you now?'

'Like I came back to know what time it was.'

'Time for a doctor.'

'Not till after nightfall,' said Charlie.

Mick stayed with him through the day, now and again brewing cups of tea for him in the battered tin on the recovered oil stove: not talking much and hardly being spoken to at all. He waited until night seeped in at the small window and settled in the crannies before he lit the candle. Then he went for the doctor.

The doctor, a young man in a hurry, had no reason to delay with his opinion. He took Mick aside and told him it was a matter of where he wished that his brother should die.

'How long will it be?' Mick asked.

'Longer than you can look after him here,' the doctor told him. 'Weeks, a month maybe.'

The doctor also knew his people.

'Look here,' he added, 'I can get him a bed. I can't get him into hospital on the ticket. His being an incurable will mean. . .'

'I know, I know,' Mick cut in. He added: 'Do you mind goin' as far as the door, doctor, till I have a word with himself.'

The doctor went to the door as Mick returned inside the sack-ing. Mick walked up and down a few times, raking the boards with the look of offence in his small peevish eyes, as if the floor had swallowed his last threepenny bit. He sat on his bed and

poked for the pipe inside the lining of his jacket. He frowned at the pipe as if he blamed it for hiding. He bit viciously on the chewed stem and lit a match. The match paused on the way to the pipe head. The match burned out in his fingers. He lit another match and lighted the tobacco with it in the leisurely way of the lead-up to a drink: the hurt had left his eyes.

'I suppose I'll have to poke out a supply of smokes for you first thing in the mornin',' he said. 'You'll want them in . . . that place.'

'Oh . . . that place,' echoed Charlie, with Mick's emphasis on the two words.

Mick spoke at length then, from a quick opening gradually taking time and sparing breath.

'We went there with my mother wan time, you remember. We were young lads, and she was young in her Sunday clothes. 'Twas a great thing to feel Sunday clothes in the middle of the week, or any ordinary day. She took us there that day: we were young and she was young herself in a Sunday bonnet and coat. She had a basket of things, with oranges on top. We wanted to do for so many of the oranges that she asked us was it we were sick or the neighbour in . . . that place.'

'That place . . .' said Charlie.

'Tis quare how you remember a thing,' said Mick. 'I remember she saying that day: it was a fine sunny day the way it is in my mind now—I remember she sayin' an' the sun shinin' on the world that it didn't matter; that it didn't matter at all that the old stock neighbour would go the rest of the way in that place. 'Tisn't where, but how, that matters, she told us. Then she put a smilin' eye on me an' said: 'The thing is, not to finish in jail, of course.' Thinkin' she saw me stealin' that other orange, I put it back. And she laughed out. And we laughed. We all laughed together. Then she gave us an orange each and said that was the last now, and no more: not to spoil the clane white collars now, and no more. 'Tis quare how you remember a thing.'

'The doctor is waitin' at the door,' Charlie reminded.

'Oh, be damned, yes,' said Mick.

He got to his feet, but he did not move away. After a pause he walked as far as the sacking.

'I suppose I'll tell him,' he said.

'I suppose,' said Charlie. 'Tell him that as a doctor he's a sound judge.'

Mick joined the doctor at the door.

'That'll be all right, doctor,' he said.

'I'll phone the ambulance and have him removed straight away,' the doctor decided. 'I can fill in the red tape in the morning.'

'Fill it in tonight, doctor,' Mick told him. 'An' while you're at it fill out a form for me. You know the names. He's Charlie, I'm Mick. I'll call for mine tonight.'

'For—' the doctor began.

'That place,' said Mick.

With the last threepenny bit snuggled in the right peak of his waistcoat he followed the doctor down the lane and bought Charlie a packet of smokes for the road.

7

When the ambulance came Mick held the door of the house open for the driver and his helper to pass out with the prostrate Charlie on the stretcher. When Charlie was laid in the ambulance he went and hovered about the door. He could not make up his mind whether it was better that Charlie had either no breath or no mind to whistle.. He called into the gloom of the cab, below the glow of gaslight through the high, square cab windows.

'Charleen.'

'Well?'

'Are you there?'

'I think so.'

'I'll see you tomorra.'

'If I'm not there I'll be elsewhere.'

'I'll bring a drop,' said Mick.

'You can launch me with it,' said Charlie.

The driver brought the engine to life. The helper entered the cab and closed the doors. The ambulance felt its way down the narrow place, bumping gently on the cobbles. Before it was out of sight Mick went back into the house. The dead smell of the place repelled any memories the walls might have huddled between them. He went beyond the sacking into the candle light. Apart from the candle flame the only bright thing in the small space was the statue: the too-bright blue of cloak and white of gown was toned by the dust, and in the soft light the gilt-gold of the rosary had the patina of the antique. The corkscrew put Mick in mind of a thirst he had no way of relieving. He snuffed the candle out, crushing the frail blossom of light with his fingers. Then he left the house to call on the doctor for his workhouse ticket.

GEOFFREY TAYLOR

AN ULSTER GRAVE IN TALLAGHT CHURCHYARD

Below this monumental urn,
This early nineteenth century urn,
Lie Betsy Brown and Betsy Grundy
In cool untroubled unconcern,
Awaiting the triumphal Fun-day,
World's final turn,
Night done, and done day.

Of fully four-score years and six
Was Betsy Grundy, eighty six,
Born long before young Betsy B.,
Outlived her—lingered long to mix
With Betsy Brown, aged twenty three,
Her dust. Time ticks
From A to Z by B and G.

There rest you Betsies—Grundy, Brown,
Betsy Grundy, Betsy Brown,
Between cool earthy sheets—mere earth.
Beneath gold lilled eiderdown
Await (changed metaphor) new birth,
Loyal harp and crown,
Immortal mirth.

We know with what familiar song,
With what familiar jubilant song,
By the bright lilies in full bloom,
(Lest any do your memory wrong,
Clear as your tombstone reads your tomb)
You'll join the throng
In Day of Doom.

LOCHLINN MacGLYNN

ROSEMARY

SEVEN years—yes, it would be seven years now—since Rosemary first left the valley. That would be correct, seven years, because I remember them saying when she came home again that she had been five years away. It would be in September she came home . . . September of the year before last.

She went away, you remember, to work in the home of some English family; and then drifted to some industrial city, where accommodation and good wages and a canteen are to be had by Irish girls. Some munitions factory, perhaps. The rumour returned at one time that she was a conductor on the buses in Liverpool. If that is true, what an odd thing for her. She had always a sense of values, and I think a sense of money, but she resented all authority, and to administer it in any form (especially in daily contact with all sorts of strange people) must have been very odd for her indeed.

Of course, she *was* odd in many ways. There was nobody quite like her in all the valley. There is nobody quite like her even to-day, although at twenty-seven, with the experience of her marriage behind her,—and it was a most unsuccessful marriage,—she is entering what you might call the uninteresting years.

Her marriage—yes, that is the point, of course. She brought back a very strange name with her, one of those odd names you find among soldiers of Continental extraction. Something like Schliegelman . . . I am not quite sure. It is always difficult to place the 'i's' and the 'e's' in their right order, but it makes little difference, really. Her name in the valley is, and always will be, Rosemary Curran.

She was never, some people will tell you, Curran at all, but she is certainly not that other odd name. Uncharitable things are sometimes said about children who grow up as different as day and night from the rest of their family, but I think the valley was very glad to have her, if only in a vicarious way; it was a very indirect form of gladness. It excited them to know that on summer days, strange and important men stared out of their passing motor-cars, and saw in the dust again old dreams along these narrow roads. Yes, she made the valley exciting, without making it notorious. She was perfect in her behaviour. She was the emotional toy-gun that old maids like to play with in their ageing gossip.

Her mother gave her a name that was unusual among the Rosies and the Sarahs, the Marys and the Rebeccas of the valley. A Rebecca will become Beckie, but she remains Rosemary, and

there has always been this little flush of excitement in the way people say it . . . Rosemary Curran. Perhaps they say it with the hot breath of scandal—a scandal that is almost submerged and defeated by her behaviour, and that doesn't quite shock them into incoherence—but they say it, yes, with excitement.

You might think many people were in love with her as she grew up, but I knew only one man whose love was consistent and enduring, in the romantic sense. No, it was never merely a thing of secret meetings, of furtive embraces, of dark hours under sycamore trees in the dripping showers of dark winter nights. He is still in love with her, and lives only a few fields away. His name—it matters little, but you may care to have it—is Pat O'Mara. His little farm, where he has spent all his years, is like a bawneen on the head of the hill, a bawneen knitted by God and himself, a patchwork of green and brown.

They didn't always make a magnificent job of the farm, God and himself. The devil—in the sense in which Rosemary was desirable and became a passion with him in spite of his advanced age—came between the partners. She was extremely young at the time, no more than eighteen; and why oldish men fall in love with a girl of her sort, I do not know. Except, perhaps, she is a throw-back for them; something they dreamed out of the dust long ago. I have only the facts; they do not speak very intelligently for themselves; and one can only guess at the inner hearts of people.

She was the only girl in his life—of that I am very sure—and there will be no other, except—well, except he imagines he sees the same thing again somewhere else. This would be unfortunate . . . to be a fool again for some schoolgirl who would be only a photograph of Rosemary Curran.

If I had been in love with her, it would be difficult to describe her as she was then, after her schooldays when she wandered the valley. Her features and all the details of her form and clothes would be lost in a general impression of vitality and youth; but I remember her clearly, because she meant nothing to me. She wore a coloured head-scarf, neat brown shoes that always seemed new, no stockings in summer, a high blue polo jumper or sometimes a yellow one, a brown skirt or a plaid affair, and a boyish coat always unbuttoned.

She kept her hands in her pockets, and you imagined, as she walked towards you along the summer roads, that this was a way of concealing her emotions, as if she could pour them into her clenched hands in her pockets. There seems always to have been this clenched emotion in her; a girl made for outdoor pursuits, perhaps horses, which she didn't have access to in that way; or a factory, into which she didn't quite fit. She was unfitted for one by her upbringing on a miserable small farm; and she was unfitted to the other (to some coarse city factory) because of her temperament, and anyway she deserved better.

This is not to be snobbish about her, or to say that she was better than her environment, or that she would have gained something by belonging to the many riderless admirers of the hunt who do not know the difference between a fox and a goose. There was none of this social ambition in her; only the little quality of hardness, which in the countryside one associates with horses, and these, as I say, were not possible in that sense for Rosemary Curran.

She was not tall; a little stocky; a firm, wide body, with auburn hair irregularly parted, soft features that at the same time were pugnacious in a boy's way; and bold deeply blue eyes that looked straight into yours, as they did that evening on the river when she came down the meadow to keep the first date she had ever made. We had met many times, but never this way; and it was difficult for both of us to make the transition from the banter of schooldays to this new relationship.

Our meeting opened with impersonal remarks; developed into high-spirited chatter about the things to hand, such as the rod and line, the meadow and the river; and ended in confused shyness, like the river itself flowing away into something that was too great for it. She was the sort of girl you either loved, or didn't play around with; there was no place for her with the other girls in the dark hedges, making love on October nights; and it seemed inevitable, from the few points of contact that she had with us, that she would leave the valley far behind.

After that, we met here and there; casual meetings, unforeseen; at a dance once, when the band had been brought at great expense from a town seven miles away, and was playing an amateurish waltz tune I had written; rather, the words were mine and were amateurish, and the tune was passable. We met casually after that at a house-dance in a neighbouring townland to celebrate the end of the harvest. She said some pleasant things on the first occasion about the hopeless little song; and at the harvest dance she recalled it. Then, between sessions of helping the family with the supper things for the large gathering, she confided to me an old story that is always extraordinary. An old farmer was in love with her, she said; he had considerable money, as money goes in the valley, and her parents were not inclined to laugh as loudly at him as she did. There is something in these situations that flatters one's own youth, and you say without much conviction: "But perhaps he is honourable about it. Tread lightly, Rosemary, on people's dreams."

At that moment she was called away from the room, and went without replying. She came back to say, in a most orderly approach to the problem, that he was really old, as ages go; that this might make no great difference, but that he was horrible in his ways, and in the approaches he made to her. She shuddered at the recollection, and the way she expressed her emotion was unusual, like everything about her. It was a sort of raising of her

shoulders, and standing on tip-toe, as if she were looking over the edge of Heaven; but you could see in her pouted lips a passionate interest in the world out of which she was standing on tip-toe.

He was fifty-four, she said; it was ridiculous, really. He had jet-black hair that ought to have turned grey many years ago, and every wind blowing against him blew her the scents of the farmyard. She had watched, she told me, the summer breezes run under his loose flannel shirt like waves, and she had thought (as a child might think in some other connection) that death would be better than to know him as the wind knew him, playing freely as it did with his crude, unwashed, long-haired body.

This was not exactly her way of putting it, because there was always a strange logic, a close observation, a lack of emotion in her conversation. Her body would become excited, yes, but more expressive than excited; but her voice would be calm and even beautiful in the presence of horror. And she said rather sweetly: "Am I really so ugly that only people like this will love me? I wonder."

This picture of the man who loved her remained with me for a long time, because of the very calm with which she made it nauseating. He was not, when I came to know him, horrible at all. He was a rather timid old bachelor who had never accepted the fact that he would always remain a bachelor. Marriage was a sort of endless half-hope that he wove into the thread of his days, and it was his bachelor's weakness that he had never decided not to marry. In this adolescent mood, this indecision, he had seen, through the briars in blackberry time, the face of a Madonna. Now, the thread of his days was knotted; his simple textures of half-hope and futility were tangled with the lives of others. It was unfortunate but likely for a lonely frustrated man of his years.

He was admirable in many ways, you know; his farm was prosperous at that time; he was in the fields at six on summer mornings and at daybreak in winter, leaving only at ten on the long evenings, or at nightfall when September came. No one had ever seen him taking a drink, and he smoked only occasionally—usually if some visitor or passerby offered him a cigarette. He would puff at the cigarette as if he were taking part in a competition, and would throw it away, triumphantly, half-smoked. Awkward, yes, he was that, of course; but there was a tenderness in him, too, under the hard crust of the clay-covered years. His emotion about Rosemary, I imagine, was at all times honourable, even respectfully detached, but he thought she was best won as a boy would win her, and in demonstrating how young he was, he had seemed grotesque to her.

She never told me of other men, which now strikes me as unusual. Someone in the valley, someone of her own age and type, must surely have made approaches to her. She was a girl who could steal your mind, meeting you on the summer roads. She had no reason to confide anything to me of these normal experiences that must have come her way.

She walked alone each Sunday to an early Mass in the village chapel, and vanished for the remainder of the week. I got to know her steps passing under my window, when I was in bed late on Sunday mornings. Long before last Mass she was at home again. She disliked the village; she was never part of it. But her steps would echo all down the Sunday, and I would admire—as one always does—the courage she had in behaving better than her environment, yet with perfect equality and loyalty towards the people from whom she came.

There was no question of bartering them for a place in the village life; they were her people in the outlying townlands, awkward and thrifty and sometimes mean by necessity; but her people. Years later, when I had gone to London to make the fortune that one is supposed to find there, I could see her walking through the village like a queen. She had her subjects, her followers in the backward farms; the villagers had only their shops and their little distinctions, for it was almost a town. She was magnificent, remembered in this way; and then I received, one December morning, perhaps the first letter she ever wrote to anyone.

It was no more than a dozen lines, in a watery black ink, and the address at the top of it was not her own. It was the address of a Mrs. Menzies, a stranger in "the town" (as Mrs. Menzies always called it) who owned a small teashop. She had been nearly ten years in the district, but would always—as is the way of things in a small community—be a stranger and partly suspect. She was a tall angular woman of independent mind, and the friends she made in the village were all unusual, in the same pleasant way as Rosemary. They came to her, I think, in the same way as outcasts go to a shipping office without much money; to see the world on the counter. She had some sort of past, nobody quite knew where.

Rosemary's letter began by recalling Mrs. Menzies, and went on to say that I would find this address the best one to use if I wished to reply. Perhaps, she went on naively, I would remember Rosemary Curran, who had taken this awful Post Office pen in hand. She was anxious to leave the village, to go to England; and perhaps I might know, being in England, where she had best to go. Any old thing would be satisfactory, although she supposed there was nothing she could do really well. Other people had gone away, and she wished to follow them. She ended by saying that she often remembered me, and often wondered what I was doing at a particular moment; and that she had, as I would know, very few friends; and that if I did not remember her, or were too busy, I need think no more about her.

One evening, over the telephone, I gave her name and address to an Employment Agency. They assured me they would write to her, and that they might find her suitable for a small post in a large house in Durham County. That was the last I heard of her

for four years, and by that time I was in the village again and she was in Liverpool. The war was on.

Her next letter came, four years after the first one, with the same suddenness as before. There was a strain of humour in it—a strained humour—and she began by saying that the old man on the hill would be sorry to hear of her forthcoming marriage. She wondered how he would say the name she proposed taking. Schiegelman, I think it was. She hoped she was making a wise decision—he was a soldier—and it would be odd returning to the village one day with a handful of foreign children she had raised herself. She would sail away from England with her husband when the war was over, and she asked me, again in her strain of sad amusement, to stand one day at the Yellow Fence and throw a kiss for her up the side of the hill.

This was a gesture that was very much outside my temperament, but the mention of the Yellow Fence intrigued me. It was I discovered, the exact boundary between her father's farm and O'Mara's, and the two farmers had perhaps hoped to see it removed one day, at least in effect, in a unity of families. It was well up on the hillside, and gave you a clear view of her house below you, of O'Mara's above you; of the river between soft meadows; the village of smoking chimneys; and much of the valley.

It was here, on a casual ramble, that I met O'Mara in the days of his dissipation. He had given way to a good many vices since Rosemary left, and although his house and his fields were there, and seemed much the same to an outsider, they were owned now by the bank and other creditors. With a certain amount of premeditated casualness, he asked me to go across to his house for a drink. He seemed lonely, and I went. I had been there fully an hour when he remembered about the drinks; he seemed anxious to get information from me on a specific subject before relaxing. The subject was Rosemary.

He had heard the rumour of her marriage, which was now over, and when I left him he was sprawled at the fireside with a bottle, his memories, and an overflowing glass. He had lost the world.

The thin duskish night, peculiar to low hills near a village, dropped over the elevated fields, and I remember thinking, as I went hurriedly and happily downhill in the glow of the summer night and of youth and the drinks, that he would look extremely odd in the company of Rosemary as I imagined she would be to-night.

The most dangerous side of his vices was that they were mostly solitary; lonely orgies of drinking. There was some suggestion of a woman of poor reputation seen crossing the field at times; but knowing the almost absolute purity of his emotions, I never believed this story, and few people do.

The local Superintendent of Guards was my good friend in those days, and one day I met him as he was returning, a good

deal bewildered, from O'Mara's farm. A decree had been put through for non-payment of rates, and the tillage people were prosecuting for neglect of war-time requirements. He told the Superintendent that the Guards could plough the farm, that they were all strong men; or that they could take the farm away with them, if they could get it through the Briary Gap. He denied that the confusion of thistles and bluebells was his; they belonged, he said, to the Providential Bank, to the County Council, and to various other people. His collapse was complete at this time, his life futile, his stock drunk away except for a few bedraggled calves that he pelted with firewood through the open door when they came searching for a mash. They expressed, these remaining animals more than anything else, his state of poverty, and I can still see them wilting in hunger and dejection in the ruined fields, like stupid survivors in some ruined world struck by what we call a falling star. Then Rosemary came home.

Rosemary came home again. She had matured now, and was lovelier than ever; she came home alone. I used to see her occasionally when I went walking in the evenings. We would exchange some remarks about the weather, the crops, the whist drives, the travelling players who came sometimes to the village hall, and we would say good-bye, as one does in the country, by walking backwards away from each other, until one of us reached the nearest bend. Within sight, within mind. She would say, *You are not going to the dance*, and I would say no, that the dances had no interest for me. I would say, on some other occasion, *You are not going to the whist drive*, and she would say no, that she had never learned to play. She remarked how strange it was to have a husband, and yet have no husband; to be married, to have found it a mistake, and to have separated by choice. She added that many war marriages had proved to be poor affairs, and we said no more about it. The valley had taken her back as Rosemary Curran; and Rosemary, instead of that other odd name, she would always be.

Her return worked a miracle. Old O'Mara became prosperous again, and went diligently about his work. They seldom saw each other, except at the distance of some fields, and when they did come across each other by accident, it was only with the briefest acknowledgements. She cared little whether he still loved her; and the flame of his own passion burned now like a night-light in a quiet nursery, contenting his child-heart. He worked to a careful time-scheme in his fields, restoring them to the well-knit bawneen that once clothed the hill; and God seemed to co-operate with him again in making his farm the pride of the valley.

His early desire was no longer a thing of humour to Rosemary. And she refused to smile at the futility of this new distilled emotion that now possessed him, and that was more unnatural to him—for it surely involved more strain—than his earlier dissipa-

tion. The humour she had once seemed to find in all this was lost in the mess of her own life; he was no longer a figure of fun.

Could she have been meeting him secretly, I wondered, although it now seemed out of character for both of them. No, the reason was quite different. He had found a form of love that was almost saintly; it was at least sublime in its unselfishness, that made no demands. Either that, or it was completely immoral in the sense that to stop pursuing what one can never have, and to put one's love instead into the working of a hillside, is unnatural, and not perhaps honest to God or oneself; I do not know.

Once, when I told him it was good to have Rosemary back in the valley again, he said yes, it was wonderful, and he said—without any sense of shame or self-consciousness—that it was the difference between the end of him and the prosperity I could see around him.

It was certainly odd, this miracle; the sort of oddity that becomes a legend in the story of a valley. And one day I said to Rosemary—half in earnest and half in fun—that she must be proud indeed to have achieved a miracle; to know that because of her presence, because of the very fact that she was home again, a crazy old farmer believed he had re-discovered the Madonna he saw long ago through the briars in blackberry time.

She seemed disappointed. She said nothing more; only a chance remark about the sort of night it would be, and then good-bye. She walked on in a normal way in the opposite direction, homeward, without talking back over her shoulder as she usually did.

The call of the curlews brought rain, as she had said it would, and I walked faster to arrive in the village before the downpour. By now I knew that Rosemary was in love, in exactly the same way as O'Mara, and had always been in love—with someone in this valley. She had come back to find, as the crazy old farmer had found, contentment in the subdued night-light that was once a passionate flame.

The rain came, wrinkling the dust. Soon it made rushing, gurgling noises in the vennels of the village, and this gurgling seemed to grow louder, more distinct, as the shower passed away. The rain gathered itself together again at the feet of the houses and ran underground, secretly, to the river. . . .

And I was thinking, in the fresh green world that emerged from the shower, that I had been working harder since Rosemary came home; that she would never again leave the valley; and that I should never seek gold again in the dust of a city. . . .

In summer twilights, she will be walking along the hill-road, alone. Her footsteps will approach along the pavement, will pass under my window . . . fade down the street on her way to first Mass.

PHILIP ROONEY

ENTER SOME PLAYERS

SHE saw the play-bills as she slowed down the car in the mouth of the village street. They had blossomed overnight on the pillars of the Market House, black and orange, inky black and a hard staring orange that outshone the spring sunshine.

Carelessly, for in spite of her air of smooth neatness, she had never really learned the small neat tricks which enable people to do the small habitual things with accustomed ease, she bumped and scraped the car against the kerb by the Post Office and leaned over the wheel, staring down the familiar street at the flaring play-bills.

In that first moment of amused surprise it seemed that the play-bills were welcoming her, as flaring play-bills had so often welcomed her in so many unfamiliar village streets. Always she had looked for that silent, reassuring welcome. The strange town, the village visited for the first time, seemed less strange, less new, less hostile once one had seen the familiar play-bills. It was as if the advance agent, travelling ahead, pioneering with paste-pot and roll of posters, had bridged the gap between the known and the unknown and given the newcomers a small footing in a strange land.

Already, before they came trudging up the Station Road after yet another weary train journey, their names were known to strange people in strange streets. On how many hundred play-bills, in large type and in small, had her name gone before her? Angela Kerr! Her name in tiny lettering that straggled away at the foot of the bill in green and gold and black and orange. Her name, in later years, high up amidst the names in staring print, never quite at the top of the bill, but never dropping below the danger line where the inky letters began to jumble and blur in diminishing size. Her name . . .

And then she began to laugh, softly, to herself. She had a low, lovely laugh that shone in her soft eyes and, quivering gently over the soft line of cheek and chin, betrayed the fact that she was not now as slender and youthful as the Angela Kerr of the play-bills had been. The laughter trembled about her mouth and showed the too-full softness of her rounded chin. The laughter brought a pink flush to her cheeks and showed a too-plump curve too deeply dimpled below soft and laughing eyes. The laughter shook loose from under her neat and matronly hat a strand of hair that would soon be grey in spite of all her care. The laughter faded uncertainly and died away. Under the thin stuff of her

springtime coat her plump shoulders moved sharply, as if she had been touched by a sudden chill.

Angela Kerr! But she wasn't Angela Kerr any more. She was Angela Davern, Mrs. Tom Davern, with three small children and a husband busy with the springtime calls of a Meath farm. Busy! Heavens, she had better hurry. On a farm everyone was always busy, too busy to waste time in day-dreaming.

She laughed again, but now more briefly and on a bright and tinkling note. Quickly, carelessly slamming shut the door of the shabby car, she hurried briskly across the pavement, a busy, bustling, youngish woman, a little too plump in a bright coat that had grown a shade too tight.

The hum of voices in the little shop died away so quickly on her entry and spurted up again with such brittle brightness that she knew the morning shoppers had been talking about her. The sight of the play-bills and the little excitement of the play company's announced arrival would be enough to start them gossiping. Not inimically or hurtfully, she thought, but curiously. They would be wondering once again how Tom Davern—quiet, sensible Tom Davern, going on late holiday to Bundoran had come home with a wife, chosen after a fortnight's courtship, from a troupe of seaside actors. For fifteen years, in moments such as this, they had been remembering and wondering in idle curiosity. Easy laughter flickered again behind her eyes. There were moments when she herself wondered.

"Is it a play company coming, Miss Mac?" she called out over the ripple of voices. She still knew the acting trick of pitching her voice so that it rang over the murmur of background talk, and she had never lost the actor's trick of taking the centre of any stage. She felt a little tingle of happy satisfaction as she heard the murmur of voices die down. "Who are they at all? I couldn't read the posters from the car."

"'Tis a new crowd, Mrs. Davern." There was a faint resentful sharpness in Miss Mac's voice that satisfied Angela that her cool entry had been mischievously satisfactory. "By the look of the lad that was round with the bills I wouldn't say they were much good."

"I don't know about that." Someone spoke up from the shadows. "I heard that the Canon over in Murrow asked them to stay over Sunday to play 'Under the Red Robe' the second time."

"Oh! 'Under the Red Robe'!"

Angela put down her shopping list on the counter. She was remembering, not wistfully, but with detached professional interest. Remembering the trouble with the costumes, the black velvets that always showed the crushing from the hampers, the flowing crimson robe that always seemed shabby in the glare of the footlights, the tricky business in the second act that was so

hard to manage in the cramped quarters of a village stage.

"'Under the Red Robe'," she said. "It'll be one of the old companies so?"

"'Deed and it's not." Miss Mac's air of resentment deepened. She had been too long the village oracle to take kindly to rivalry. "A crowd that was never here before. 'Langan Bayley's Irish Players'!"

Langan Bayley? No! The name meant nothing to her. But then names in the business never did mean much, Angela thought, the shadow of a smile at her mouth again. Every new company started with a new name, a name so fanciful and elaborate that no one ever used after the first week on the road.

Langan Bayley? And then, her arms piled high with parcels, she remembered. Langan Bayley! That would be Tommy Langan, old Madam Bayley's son. Madam Bayley who toured the Bowes-Bayley Operatic Company for close on thirty years.

Not that Tommy had been a singer. He had drifted away from his mother's fit-up as soon as he was able for a walk-on. She was remembering him now, conjuring up his memory from the shadowy memories of a half-forgotten past. He flickered through those fading shadows, an insubstantial shadow, tantalizingly vague. A thin, dark lad he had been, she remembered uncertainly, eager and restless. She caught for a moment at a vivid memory of dark excited eyes and dark hair falling over a thin dark face.

Slowly, a little of her accustomed brisk careless bustle lacking, Angela spilled the parcels into the car. While she fumbled ineptly with gears and levers memories became clearer. Not quite memories of Tommy Langan himself, but memories of the companies in which she remembered—or thought that she remembered—having acted with him; 'The Three Macs', a concert party playing sketches and one-acters; old Johnny Boland's crowd, one of the last of the old fit-ups, with its heavy lead forever boasting of the days when he had played in Liverpool with Barry Sullivan; the crowd, the name would not come back to her, who had played 'Journey's End' in Mullingar and made such a mess of it that the soldiers in the back seats had cat-called them off the stage; that week in Sligo when Carton's Repertory had put on 'The Sign of the Cross' and old 'Major' Carton had given her her first chance, her fair hair loose over the snowy white of her virgin-martyr's robe, her eyes downcast in saintly resignation.

She did not turn the car in the empty street but drove slowly down to the Market House and stopped within reading distance of the black and orange posters.

Heavens! Did nothing ever change? The old familiar inky black border of roses and shamrocks surrounding the black-lettered heading; 'The Langan-Bayley Company of Irish Players'. And the Plays! A little gust of laughter, soft and uncertain, swept her and left her eyes moist and blurred. 'A Royal Divorce' and

'Under Two Flags'. She had a sudden choking memory of herself in the kilted skirt and rakish cap of the little French vivandiere. 'The Lily of Killarney' and 'Under the Red Robe'. And there, plumb in the centre of the bill, under Wednesday's date, was the main item of the week, the show that would fill the house if the first two nights had opened badly, or would bring them in if attendances showed signs of falling off at mid-week.

The announcement stood out blackly and bravely in its frame of shamrocks and roses: 'For The First Time On Any Irish Stage, The Grand Historical Drama of Ninety Eight, "The Irish Cavalier" With Langan Bayley And A Full Supporting Cast'.

Black lettering on an orange ground, and beneath the lettering, in his own oval frame of roses and shamrocks, Langan Bayley himself, a lean, romantic, brooding face under the great shadow of a wide black hat.

How often had she dreamed of seeing her own name and her own picture in just that centre position on the bill? But mostly you had to own the show yourself to get there. She had always known that only too well. She had known it on that day fifteen years ago when she had stood up with Tom in the cold bright church in Bundoran, while outside the September winds howled the end of the summer, and within the entire company—lead and heavy and juvenile, baggage man and stage manager—had watched her prepare to play a new part. She had known it then. Perhaps she had known it even on that day, six and twenty years ago, when she had stood in the draughty dimness of a barn-like room off Thomas Street, waiting for her cue in the rehearsal of a show that would start its tour next night in some small and now forgotten village on the Naas road. One always knew; but knowing did not stop one hoping.

"Ah, well! Good luck to you, Tommy!" She smiled up at the dark, brooding, half-remembered face that looked down sombrely on her plump prosperity. She remembered the old half-mocking tribute. "Maybe it's not a big bill, but you've got the best spot on it."

Memory was warmly with her as she drove home through the springtime fields, humming a song that was more than fifteen years old. Memory not of the dark brooding face in its black and orange frame, for that memory had never been more than shadowy, but a more subtle memory that came to her with the scents of the lush fields, a memory of the tobacco reek in airless rooms, the oily smell of grease paint, the stale scent of spilt face-powder, the ammoniacal stench of spluttering gas jets.

That odd uneasy memory stayed with her through all the long day, stronger than the rich smell of baking in the warm kitchen, sharper than the tarry scent of the soap in the children's bath tub, keener than the tang of the turf smoke in the warm room that had her own air of untidy comfort about it. It was there, half

forgotten, in the haze of the cigarette she most enjoyed, the cigarette at the end of the day's work.

She blinked sleepily through the cigarette haze, aware with part of her mind of movement and the low murmur of voices in the children's room upstairs, aware of the thinning patch in Tom's reddish grey hair when he stooped to fiddle with the tuning knob of the radio.

"Anything special on, Tom?" she asked, idly, without interest, in an accustomed wifely trick of making talk. "Something you want to hear?"

"Me? Lord, no!"

He sprawled back in his chair, pipe loose between his teeth. He was getting stout, Angela thought calmly, his good looks a little blurred and coarsened.

"By the time I'm ready to listen-in," he grinned cheerfully, "there's nothing left to listen-in to. Thought I might get the ten o'clock news." He made a thumbing gesture towards the radio and its faint pulse and beat of music. "Want to listen to this stuff?"

"Leave it on. It'll do. There was a play . . . but it's too late now. It was on at half nine, I think." Suddenly, with an unaccountable feeling of guilt, she remembered that she had not told him about the play company in the village. "That reminds me. There's a show company coming to the Market House next week."

"Poor devils." He was pulling happily at his pipe, making loud gurgling noises. "There's a breeze in that Market House that'd skin a brass monkey."

"I played in worse stands."

"You? Oh! Of course. That's right."

With a sudden shock of surprise, almost of anger, she knew that the memory of her early days had faded to utter unimportance in his mind.

"Is it a crowd you used to know?" he asked, fumbling at his watch, half his attention on the radio.

"They're a new crowd." She was ashamed of the small evasion as soon as she had made it. "I think I used know the fellow that's running the show. Tommy Langan. It might be fun to go in to see them one night."

"Anything you say. Monday night or Tuesday suit you?"

"Oh, Heavens no! They're doing 'The Divorce' on Monday and old 'Red Robe' on Tuesday."

"What's wrong with that? Aren't *they* any good?"

"Any Good? These two. . . ."

She stopped short, and for a moment they had the baffled, exasperated look of folk silenced by a lack of common language.

"It's just that they're old plays, stale, played out. I've seen them scores of times. . . . acted in them. There's a new play on

Wednesday night, 'The Irish Chevalier'.

She smiled in the firelight, foreseeing in her mind's eyes the gaudy costumes, the flamboyant action. A faint unaccustomed malice edged her smile. "You'd like it, I think."

"Not a hope." He put away his watch and leaned over to adjust the radio switch for the ten o'clock time signal. "I'll be up at the market on Wednesday. Some other night?"

"No use. The end of the week's desperate stuff, as usual." Suddenly it was becoming of the greatest importance that she should see the play on Wednesday evening, see Langan Bayley stride and swagger through the heroic adventures of 'The Irish Chevalier'. "I could take the children."

"Better not." He was leaning towards the radio now, an ear cocked in the unnecessary effort of concentration that always irritated her. "Sally's cold won't be better; she'll hate it if you take the others and leave her." The time signal and the announcer's voice claimed the last remaining scrap of his attention. "Why don't you call for Molly Dolan and take her along. Bet she'll love it—if you pay."

"Yes! I could do that. I could. . . ." She suddenly remembered that Molly Dolan would be away at her sister's wedding. She paused for a moment, and then said very slowly, over his inattention, over the rumble of the announcer's voice reading lists of fat stock prices: "I could call for Molly. I could do that."

* * *

For a moment she felt lonely, solitary, even a little frightened when she stepped out of the car in the early dusk of the Wednesday evening and joined the playgoers straggling through the fan of light before the entrance door of the Market House.

"Electric light," she told herself. "Changed times! Lord! What a fuss there used always be, borrowing oil-lamps, searching shops for carbide for the flares. And now electric light, even in the smallest stands. Changed times surely."

But little else had changed. The girl collecting the tickets at the stair head was wearing a shabby coat over her stage dress; her stage make-up, seen close to, had the crude innocent shamelessness of a child's daubing. Within, all was as it always had been in a thousand and one village halls: whistling, cat-calling boys; the tinkling piano; the drop curtain that didn't fit by a good six inches. And they were still using footlights, Angela noticed with wry amusement, using naked electric bulbs crudely hooded with brown paper.

No! Nothing had changed. Least of all the play. For all its advertised newness, she found herself knowing every line and scene, every tag, every echo from a score of stage-worn plays. They used to love a play like this, she remembered; a play not so much written as pieced together, with a climax borrowed from one old-time favourite of the audience, a situation lifted from some

other proved success, the lines gagged at rehearsal, the action chopped and changed and cut to the accommodation of each new stage.

Acting hadn't changed much, she told herself; hadn't changed much for the better. The little girl who had taken the tickets wasn't bad at all as the hero's Irish mother,—if only she'd learn what to do with her hands. And the small, fair lad, the one who doubled 'Major Sirr' and the Redcoat Officer, she liked him; he was a worker. The leading lady was very poor, stiff and awkward, a clumsy foil for Langan Bayley's 'Irish Chevalier'.

Langan Bayley was the play. Most likely he had written it for himself, Angela knew, giving himself all the most impressive entrances, all the really dramatic curtain lines. But even so, he was magnificent. He was Wolfe Tone and Lord Edward, Bartholomew Teeling and William Orr, all rolled into one. He strode the stage in a jingle of spurs and a clanking of swinging sabre. Under his plumed hat his lean, romantic, sombre face looked haughtily on attacking Redcoats, scornfully on knavish traitors, tenderly on the heroine in her robes of flowing green. In the last act, brought forth to die, he looked and talked rather like Sidney Carton, a nobler-seeing Sidney Carton, splendid in white shirt frothing with frilled cambric, white buckskins and gleaming Hessian boots.

Wisely he did not come before the drop curtain at the end of the show but left it to the little fat, commonplace stage manager to announce that autographed photographs of Langan Bayley could be purchased at one shilling and sixpence and that the next evening's performance would be 'The Lily of Killarney'.

The audience, bemused by the memory of that lean, dark face under a feathered hat, that great booming voice, those gestures twice as large as life, surged down the stairs, carrying Angela in its murmuring tide.

At the shadowy angle of the stairs, where a small door led to the rooms behind the stage, a man was peering out, beckoning to a boy in the crowd. He was a gaunt, peevish looking fellow, sallow-faced and with great pouched eyes. He was stripped to a working shirt of grey flannel, not very clean and gaping open at the throat.

"Hey! You! Youngster!" His voice was hoarse and rasping. "Here's a bob for you. Cut down to Hennessy's and get ten Woodbines. Look lively. If the door's closed when you get back, knock and tell them you've fags for Mr. Langan Bayley."

He vanished into the shadows, the door slamming behind him. Near the entrance the girl who had taken the tickets was waiting to lock up. She leaned against the wall, wearily, whistling softly through her teeth, bringing bad luck on the show, Angela thought angrily. And then, on an impulse, she turned to the girl.

"Look! Can I see Mr. Bayley?"

"If it's signed photographs you want, I can get them. . . . Oh! You want to see the guvnor himself. O.K. Up the side stairs there. First room on the right. You'll find him there."

But there was no one in the room except the man in the dirty grey flannel shirt. His hands were dirty too, nails black rimmed, knuckles grimed with dirt. He slewed round in his chair, his tired pouched eyes curious.

"Looking for someone?" His eyes darted over her, not knowing her, but appraising her fur coat, her new smart hat. He stood up, his cracked Hessian boots making a brave show in the harsh light, a little dust of white powder falling from his soiled buckskins. His hoarse commonplace voice took on effortlessly a deep, warm quality. "A photograph, perhaps? Delighted, I'm sure,"

He rummaged amidst the litter on his table for a stub of pencil and took from the pile before him a photograph, the photograph of a lean, brooding, romantic face under the great shadow of a wide black hat.

From her place in the shadows near the door, not saying anything, for now there was nothing to say, Angela watched him scrawl in bold, untidy, careless letters—"Langan Bayley".

TEMPLE LANE

THE PICNIC ON THE SHORE

Under sun-weary blue the sandhills lay
like dune-humped dromedaries. All the tide
was clear as cellophane: the ripples died
before they reached us from the outer bay—
us, half-stripped, wholly summer-drugged, and salted
like starfish. But the sea-spume of the mind
soon flew in words. Someone said the Wrecker haunted
in the sandhills a house and garden. If you climbed
into the warren you might find the stones,
the hearth unshifted—only, no one dare,
for those who found it still are wandering there!
You said—“No house! But several asses’ bones!”

We passed to talk of animals made comic,
and the uneconomic kangaroo. Someone said
kangaroos should be bred as tall as a village steeple
to carry *people*. Humour ran ahead, then fantasy :
till, someone knèw of a Wrecker worse than *he*
(or better, if you like) who round the neck
of his old blighted ass would hang a lighted lantern
and turn it roving on the cliffs, by heck!
where rocks had teeth like saws and surf came trampling.
He made a packet when corpse and crate were netted.
Good job there were no girls for him to collect
like those Circassian slaves old Soldans vetted!

The outer breakers pounding never warned
our sandhill-sheltered life.
Tide tiptoed nearer and the mist came in,
and our lost loves wheeled round our heartbeats, crying
like knife-beaked seagulls, fretful and more white
and predatory. Veils had blurred the light :
the sloping sun grew cold : a graveyard air
from teguments warned us off, and each apart
envied the countryman who gathered there
the spring tide’s harvest in his creaking cart.
The sun put on a moon-mask round and thin :
the camel sands were flooded without sound
the awful tide licked up the children’s mound.
Wraith ridden we fled from drowning or the night—
night’s Potter’s Field to bury strangers in.

DESMOND CLARKE

FUNERAL

IT was hot and airless in the cab, and I was almost asleep, but my uncle Joe kept jumping up and down in his seat, and banging his fist on the window. "Pull up at Fagan's, Larry," he bawled to the cabby, and when he sat down he sat on top of me. I kept the point of my elbow against his backside and pushed as hard as I could.

"Sorry, son," he grinned, and he squeezed my bare knee with his hot sticky hand. "You'll be game-ball in a minute," he said. "You can stretch your legs, and wet the old whistle, eh?"

He sat still for a while, his hands spread out on his knees, then he began to blow and puff. He was hot and the sweat was pouring down his face from underneath the brim of his hard hat.

I could feel the heat myself, thick and clammy it was, not a breath of air at all. Even aunt Jessica was hot, and kept fanning herself with a crumpled newspaper. My mother sitting beside her was very quiet and solemn; she seemed all squeezed up in a tight little heap—dressed in black. Every now and then she made a wry face, jerking her body upwards and belching. Her face was very red, and her eyes were swollen. When she made a noise uncle Joe leaned over towards her.

"It's the supper of steak and onions you had last night, Cissie," he said, and he grinned broadly.

"I think it is the Bass that is doing it, Joe."

"It's a windy oul' drink all right," he admitted.

"'Tis that."

Aunt Jessica clicked her tongue noisily against her false teeth and turned her head slightly towards my mother, her eyes twisted down at her. "Cissie," she said, and then she turned away and commenced fanning herself. Aunt Jessica was very respectable, and lived in a red-bricked house in Sandymount.

My mother lowered her head and sat very quiet, though now and then she gave a little start and jerked her head up. Aunt Jessica looked at me, tilting her head slightly, and handing out one of her weak watery smiles. "I'm sure you're tired and hot, dearie," she said, "but we'll be home soon. I'm sure you'll be glad, won't you?"

"I'm all right, aunt Jessica," I told her.

That didn't seem to please her for she lifted her nose in the air and fanned herself more vigorously than before. Uncle Joe gave me a prod in the ribs and winked. I didn't know what he meant, but I was sure he was making fun of aunt Jessica.

I plastered my nose against the window of the cab for a mo-

ment but just then uncle Joe began bobbing up like a jack-in-the-box, and this time he shoved his head out the window of the cab, and yelled at the driver. When he pulled himself back again he took off his hat and fanned himself with it.

"Jasus! It's a scorcher," he said, blowing a great puff through his rounded lips. "An out and out bloody scorcher; there hasn't been a day like it in years, not since the Truce and that's a helluva time ago."

"It's hot all right," my mother said, and sitting there tight in her corner looking for all the world like a wax figure going to melt.

"Hot is no name for it," uncle Joe said, "It's that bloody hot a barrel of porter 'id boil inside of me. That's a bloody fact."

Aunt Jessica's face grew sourer, and she sat bolt upright like a nun, fanning herself. After a while she undid the buttons of her coat, and pushed the fur back from around her neck. Aunt Jessica was tall and thin.

I was feeling very hot myself, but even so I enjoyed sitting in the corner of the cab, staring out of the window and feeling more important than all the people walking along the footpath. I was a bit uncomfortable though; I wanted to go to the lavatory badly. Uncle Joe seemed to know what I wanted, he patted me gently on the knee.

"We'll be there in a minute, you'll be game-ball then, won't you?"

"Yeh," I nodded, liking uncle Joe all the more.

Uncle Joe jumped up hurriedly and hammered frantically with his knuckles on the window. "Hi, Larry, Hi! Pull up here! Pull up here, man!"

"Whoa! Whoa!"

The cab drew into the kerb outside a red coloured public-house.

"Whew!" Uncle Joe blew noisily. He pushed open the door and climbed out stiffly, standing on the pavement and stretching himself. Then he looked into the cab, his hat back on his head. "Aren't you coming in?" he asked. Aunt Jessica didn't stir. Uncle Joe rolled a spit in his mouth and shot it on to the pavement with some force. "Jasus! Are you not going to have a drink?" he asked looking from one to another in the cab.

"I'll have a glass of lemonade *here*, Joseph," aunt Jessica said grandly. I knew she was in bad humour because she always called him Joseph when she was.

My mother stirred in her corner but she was so wedged in she couldn't move.

"I suppose as you're not going in I may as well have a glass of stout *here*," she said, and there were big blobs of tears in the corners of her eyes ready to overflow any minute.

"Jasus, what sort of women are you?" uncle Joe said, bobbing

his head up and down; he was rightly annoyed.

Aunt Jessica looked at him. "Joseph, remember we're coming from a burial," she said.

Uncle Joe's eyes grew wild.

"Come on out, even if it's only to stretch your legs."

"I think you've had enough for one day," aunt Jessica said.

Uncle Joe made a face.

"We may as well get out and stretch our legs," my mother said, sniffingly. She tried hard to get out of her seat but she was wedged in tight between aunt Jessica and the side of the cab.

Uncle Joe grinned. "Come on, Cissie, you'll be more comfortable inside." Then he took a hold of aunt Jessica's hand, and almost pulled her through the door.

I got out of the cab, but aunt Jessica said I should stay behind until they came out. She turned to my mother. "You wouldn't bring the child in, would you?" My mother said nothing; she was too busy trying to squeeze through the door of the cab, coming out backwards she was, but uncle Joe spoke up for me.

"What harm will it do the child?" he asked, adding, "maybe he wants to go in like any other human."

At the door of the publichouse I told him I wanted to go to the lavatory. "You're not the only one," he said. We left aunt Jessica and mother in a little room off the bar and went out to the yard at the back. When we returned my mother and aunt Jessica were quarrelling about something or other, we could hear their raised voices outside the door but they stopped talking when we sat down.

Uncle Joe hammered impatiently on the marble topped table that was covered with puddles of dry porter and dirty suds.

Aunt Jessica sighed and looked sideways at uncle Joe. "That will do, that will do."

Uncle Joe paid no heed to her but hammered away with his closed fist as if he wanted to annoy her.

A buntzy sort of a man with a screwed up monkey face, and an apron tied around his middle came into the snug. He nodded to my uncle, and wiped the puddles off the table with a dirty bit of cloth.

"What are you having?" uncle Joe asked, putting his hard hat on a spare chair behind him.

My mother gave a little belch. "A small whiskey," she said. She belched again and put her hand to her mouth. "'scuse me," she said, sniffing.

I kept looking at the picture of a man in a great black cloak and a top hat holding a glass of golden coloured whiskey in front of his face.

"What about you?" uncle Joe asked my aunt.

"A bottle of lemonade will do me," she said sourly, and

when I looked at her she was sitting upright and prim, her hands resting on her lap.

"What the hell's bitten you?" uncle Joe asked.

"Nothing."

"Aw come on, Jess."

"I think you've enough drink taken for one day. Remember you've got to go to work to-morrow."

"Forget it," said uncle Joe. "Jasus, it's not often I've a day off. Here, get us three whiskies, and—wait a minute, what'll you have, son?"

"Me? -I'll have lemonade."

"Three whiskies and a bottle of lemonade, and bring the kid some biscuits." Uncle Joe was real waxy and was drumming his fingers on the table.

The man with the green apron brought in the drinks and uncle Joe paid him.

"Here's luck," he said, taking up his glass and having a good swig. The drink put him in good humour again and he leaned back in his chair and sucked his moustache noisily, his thumbs caught in the armholes of his waistcoat; there was a big silver medal on the watch chain lying on his belly, he won it for tug-of-war when he was on Guinness's team; they pulled the D.M.P. over the line twice running.

"It's been a powerful day," he said, thoroughly satisfied with himself, "a magnificent day, thanks be to God."

Neither my mother nor aunt Jessica paid any heed to him. My mother sipped her drink quietly. Her face looked sad as though she was going to cry, and I began to think of her beside the grave when the priest took the spade from the grave-digger and threw a couple of spadefuls of clay on the coffin; she was crying real hard then and dabbing a handkerchief to her eyes. I was crying myself at the time. Aunt Jessica's drink stood in front of her and she looked at it, a sour angry look on her face. I couldn't understand her at all, maybe she was too grand to be in a public house. I drank my lemonade and ate a biscuit. The lemonade made me cooler inside.

Uncle Joe finished his drink and swiped his hand across his mouth. "Aah," he said, straightening himself up and rubbing his belly. My mother took up her glass and finished her drink; her face getting very red and she began blinking her eyes, then she leaned back in her chair, same as uncle Joe and pushed her hat back a little on her head; she looked different to what she did in the cab, and when she belched wind she gave a funny little laugh. Uncle Joe laughed too, he thought it was funny, but aunt Jessica was disgusted and annoyed so that every time my mother made a noise she clicked her tongue and said *chi, chi, chi*.

"Another drink, Cissie?" uncle asked my mother.

"All right, Joe, it does a body good."

My mother nodded her head.

Aunt Jessica wasn't pleased but she didn't say anything; she sipped her drink slowly as though she did not like it, and drummed the table absently with her fingers.

"That was a sweet drop," uncle Joe said.

"'Twas," my mother agreed, "the sweetest drop I've tasted in years. It's a pity poor Pat, may the Lord have mercy on him, isn't here to enjoy it with us." She dabbed her eyes with a black rimmed handkerchief.

"It's a pity, Cissie, a thousand pities," uncle Joe said and his voice sounded suddenly sad. "You'll miss him, Cissie, indeed we'll all miss him. Still, God's good, and you'll not be wanting for anything I'm sure."

"No, thank God, for Pat made . . . made provisions."

"Aye, he would make provision, he would indeed."

My mother sniffled.

"Don't worry, Cissie, don't worry," uncle Joe said, leaning across the table. "We've all got troubles in life, and we've all got to go when the time comes, it's . . . it's inevitable you know, the nature of things, no putting back the hands of the clock, no stopping the march of years. Let's have another drink, a sort of buck-me-up. Come on, Jess, drink up, and I'll call the lad in."

"I think we should go now," aunt Jessica said, sorrowfully, and she held a handkerchief to her eyes.

"Aw go on," uncle Joe said, hammering on the table with his glass.

The man with the green apron came in, and I finished my lemonade quickly.

"Same again," said uncle Joe, feeling in his pocket. "Hi!" he shouted after the man with the green apron. "You may as well bring another whiskey while you're at it." Then, turning to us, "I clean forgot about poor old Larry outside, dry as a bloody stone he must be sitting out there in the boiling sun."

"I'd forgotten about him myself," my mother said, "and he's a decent poor fellow."

"He is that."

"Is there any need to bring him in here?" aunt Jessica asked after a long silence.

Uncle Joe looked at her, fright written all over his face. "And why not, may I ask?"

"Why not indeed," said my mother, wrinkling her forehead and tilting her head to one side.

"Aye, why not?" uncle Joe said again.

Aunt Jessica was silent for a moment, her face hard.

"This is hardly the place for him with the family in their . . . their bereavement," she said coldly.

Uncle Joe leaned over the table.

"What's wrong with the place, eh?"

Aunt Jessica held her tongue.

"He's a friend of the family," uncle Joe persisted.

"An old friend," my mother added quietly.

Uncle Joe spat on the floor—you could hear the loud plop of the spit—then he turned to me.

"Go out and fetch Larry in. Tell him I said he was to come."

Larry was sitting on top of his cab, his hat pulled over his face, and looked as though he was fast asleep. I shouted up to him, but he musn't have heard me for there wasn't a stir out of him. I climbed up on the cab and pulled the leg of his trouser. He let a jump out of him, and I almost fell off the cab.

"My uncle said you were to come inside," I told him.

Larry's face brightened and he grinned from ear to ear.

"Eh?"

"You're to come inside for a drink!"

He climbed down from his seat. He was no bigger than myself and he had a funny screwed up face all red and spotty with pimples. He wore a bowler hat—faded green it was—pulled down over his ears, and despite the summer heat he wore a long overcoat that almost reached to the ground, yards too big for him.

"It's grand and cool inside, so it is."

"Is that so now?" He grinned at me, his face more like a withered prune than anything else.

I showed Larry the room where we were and I went over and sat at my place, but Larry stood beside the door twirling his hat in his hand and looking at the table wide-eyed.

"I was forgetting all about you, Larry," my uncle said. "Come on in man and sit down, make yourself at home."

Larry grinned.

"You must be bloody well parched," my uncle said.

Larry nodded his head and sat down at the table beside my mother. There was a rim around his forehead where his hat was sitting.

"You'll have a drop of whiskey, Larry, won't you?" uncle Joe asked.

Larry nodded his head. "Whatever is goin', sir, whatever is goin', though, mind you, 'tis hard to beat a drop of whiskey, and beggin' your pardon, ma'am, it's real good for cheering a body at a time like this, real good."

My mother sniffled, and said that it was.

"Indeed it is," uncle Joe agreed.

Aunt Jessica sat bold upright, her lips pursed and her face tight and sour, looking neither to the left nor right. It was easy seeing she was waxy, and didn't approve of Larry at all, you'd think he had the measles or something the way she ignored him.

The man with the green apron came in and placed the drinks on the table.

"Here's all the best, and may the Lord have mercy on the

souls of the faithful departed," said Larry, taking a deep drink.

Nobody spoke for a few moments, then after a while Larry turned to my uncle and asked him how he thought the day went off.

Uncle Joe wiped his moustache on the back of his hand. " 'Twas grand, Larry, grand." He caught his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat and leaned his chair back on two legs.. " 'Twas a fine funeral, I haven't seen the likes of it in years. As for the day, it's been a scorcher, a ding-dong scorcher."

" 'S fact," said Larry.

"It was a lovely day all right," said my mother; her voice had grown thick so that the words all joined together, and her eyes were glassy and sleepy looking.

"A lovely day and nobody deserved it more than Pat," uncle Joe was saying, in a thick sleepy voice. He swayed back and forward. "Pat deserved a good day for he was a decent upright fellow, as good a man as ever walked in shoe leather, and I'll say that for him not because he was my brother-in-law, but because he was a decent upright fellow. Another thing, he'd never pass you no matter what the hour of the day without asking you what you'd have. That was Pat for you, a decent upright fellow." He turned towards aunt Jessica, banging his fist down on the table so that the glasses jumped in the air. "Amn't I right?"

Aunt Jessica jerked herself up as though roughly awakened from sleep and stared at uncle Joe, wide-eyed.

"Amn't I right?" uncle Joe said again.

Aunt Jessica nodded weakly and began to sip her drink.

"We'll have another one, another one before we go," uncle Joe said.

"I don't mind if I do," my mother said, and her voice was so thick and indistinct it was hard to understand her.

Aunt Jessica coughed and pressed her hand against her flat breast; her face was very white. "I think it's time we went home," she said.

Uncle Joe swayed slightly in his chair. "Well, I don't," he said. "I'm quite happy and comfortable here."

My mother swayed uneasily in her chair. "I don't feel like going home," she said thickly. "The house is kinda, kinda lonely . . ." She sniffled, and then wiped a tear away from the corner of her eye. Uncle Joe said the house would be lonely all right and aunt Jessica bowed her head and cried quietly to herself. Larry the cabman sat staring at his empty glass, twirling it idly. I thought, like aunt Jessica, that we should go home. I was feeling lonely and wondering what the place would be like without dad. He was a strange man, I didn't see much of him but I felt that I loved him more than anybody now that he was gone. It was hard to imagine or think that he would never be in the house again. I'd miss the old dungarees covered with plaster which he

dropped on the kitchen floor every evening; I had collected the odd nails and screws and pieces of wire from the large pocket ever since I was a small nipper. Every Sunday I went to Mass with him too. In the afternoon he went off by himself in his navy suit and black bowler hat, and came back at tea time, his face red and flushed. You'd know he had a few drinks for he sat very quiet by the fire for the rest of the evening and not a word would come from him. Yes, I liked my dad. He's dead now, and everyone's drinking, everyone but aunt Jessica.

My uncle was leaning over towards the cabman, his head wobbling up and down, and he was talking in a loud strange voice.

"Not much doing in the cabs these times," he said

Larry nodded his head, real friendly.

"Divil a much, Mr. Byrne," he said. "Divil a much, barrin' an odd funeral, and the same old round-the-square at night job." He winked, and uncle Joe gave him a slap on the back.

"The same old game, the same old game," he said, laughing loudly.

The man with the green apron put more drinks on the table, and uncle Joe whispered something in his ear. The barman nodded, and uncle Joe winked.

I began to drink my fresh glass of lemonade but it tasted ugly in my mouth. Soon I felt sick, and the room began to swing madly round and round. There were voices everywhere, thick muddy voices, but the only face I could see was aunt Jessica's: one minute it was long and narrow, the next minute round and small but all the time it was there very cross and annoyed. Sometimes she spoke but what she said was drowned in uncle Joe's harsh laugh. - All the time I just wanted to close my eyes and sleep, stay real quiet, but I could not sit on the chair with the squirming pain in my stomach.

After being sick in the yard I felt better but I didn't want any more lemonade; I only wanted to go home to bed. Aunt Jessica said we should go home, that I wasn't well, but nobody else seemed to want to leave. Uncle Joe had his arm around the cabman's neck, and was laughing out loud over nothing at all, and the cabman kept saying "S right" and "You don't say so." My mother wasn't saying anything, but kept looking at them with fixed glassy eyes, her head swaying from side to side, like she couldn't keep it steady; all the time she was smiling, her mouth hanging open a little. Aunt Jessica, her face very sour and slightly flushed, sat very still and upright, her hands limp on her lap and an untouched drink in front of her.

Uncle Joe looked over at her all of a sudden like and blinked his eye. "Are you not havin' your drink, Jess?" he asked her, the words clumped together.

"I've had enough," she said stiffly, and she turned to my mother and touched her knee. "I'll take the boy home, he's not

very well," she said, adding "The air here would upset anybody."

"Yes," my mother nodded, but I knew by the way she said it that she didn't really know what she was saying.

Aunt Jessica stood up, she wobbled a bit and put her hands on the edge of the table. Uncle Joe wiped his hand vigorously across his mouth. "Are you going?" he asked.

Aunt Jessica said nothing, only nodded her head, and fixed her fur round her neck.

"What's the hurry, sure the day's young yet?" uncle Joe asked.

Aunt Jessica remained silent, her mouth tightly closed. My mother looked up at her, her head still shaking from side to side. She belched and put her hand to her mouth; she was going to say something but no words came from her.

"Ah well," uncle Joe drawled, "suppose we'd better go whilst the old cab's there."

Larry the cabman helped my mother from her chair, she seemed glued to it, and when she stood up she had to put both hands on the table and hold it hard, like an old rheumatically woman.

"Are you all right, Cissie?" uncle Joe asked, still sitting by the table.

"I'm awright," she said.

Aunt Jessica took her by one arm and the cabman by the other. Uncle Joe reached over for aunt Jessica's glass. "Have a sup, son," he said to me, "I'll knock the windy pain outa your belly." I took a sip of the stuff but it burned my mouth. I made a face. "You don't know what's good for you," uncle Joe said, taking the glass from me and draining it.

Uncle Joe told me to run along whilst he was having a word with the barman. My mother and aunt Jessica were sitting in the cab, my mother tight up in her corner, and aunt Jessica sitting upright beside her. The cabman was standing beside the cab door holding it open. I was feeling better when I got in except for the sick taste in my mouth. After a few minutes uncle Joe came out swaying from side to side and was holding a large bottle in his coat pocket. He got into the cab with difficulty, the large hard bottle digging into my side.

I must have slept for a long time for it was growing dark when I woke up. The house was very quiet, just like what it had been when dad was laid out in the big bedroom. When I went down stairs there was a light in the kitchen, aunt Jessica was sitting by the fire, staring into it, her elbows on her knees and her face cupped in her hands. She stirred when I came in, and looked at me, a weak watery smile on her face.

"You'd like some tea, wouldn't you?" she said, and her voice was soft and kind, friendly it seemed to me.

"Yes, aunt."

IRISH WRITING

She smiled and got up. "I'm sure you're feeling better now, aren't you?"

I nodded my head and then saw that her cheeks were very red, and her eyes were wet.

There was an empty whiskey bottle and some glasses on the table.

Aunt Jessica poured me out a cup of tea and cut some thin bread for me. Suddenly I thought of my father, of him lying still and peaceful in the big bed, and then of the priest, hot in his white surplice, lifting a spadeful of clay, and throwing it deep into the open grave, the mumbled prayers, the warm sun, and . . .

I lowered my head ashamedly for tears blinded my eyes, and I held my lips tightly between my teeth. Aunt Jessica touched me gently, and when I looked up at her I thought all the hardness had gone out of her face; all the sourness that made me afraid of her, and dislike her had vanished. Then I felt that aunt Jessica and I were the only people in the whole world who missed dad.

DENIS IRELAND

THE WEAVER

OVER the lough a fiery sunset glowed in the gaps of the storm clouds. A sound like distant thunder rose from the lough shore and in the half light the fields shone vivid green. A left-hand turn at a wooded crossroads, past a whitewashed school-house, then on again through deep green country. Darkness fell, a light shone from a cottage on a hill. I left the car and walked up the path to the door. In some mysterious fashion the *clack-bang* of the loom stopped before I got there and Johnny appeared, struggling into his boots. He had been finishing a web by lamplight.

"Is that yerself?" He shook hands with a grip like a vice. He was older now, a middle-age man, the fringes of his hair turning grey. A bald spot shone in the lamplight.

"Johnny," I said, "would you think of coming to America with me in the spring?"

"That wud depend," said Johnny, cautiously stroking his chin. "What wud A be goin' till Amerikay for?"

"To weave at an exhibition of linens in a big store in Philadelphia."

"Oh aye," said Johnny. "A've heerd o' that carry-on afore." He stepped aside so that the lamplight fell on me. "Tell me this," he said, "an' tell me no more. Does yer father want me till go?"

"He does, Johnny. He sent me out to see you to-night."

"Well then," said Johnny decidedly, "that settles it. If yer father wants me till go, go I will, for he's a dacent mon yer father, as dacent a mon as ever trod on shoe leather."

I tried to talk business, but Johnny would have none of it. "Blethers, mon," he said, "never you mind the details. Yer father's word is good enough for me."

And that ended it. We stood by the half-door, watching the last fiery remnants of sunset over Lough Neagh. The thing was settled. In April Johnny would sail, a commercial ambassador without portfolio, for the United States. If the man he "wrought for" said he was to go, that was enough for him. In a world where apparitions drove like storm clouds across a riven sky Johnny stood as firm and changeless as a rock on his own lough shore, as immovable as the black shapes of the mountains that reared themselves to the eastward, shutting off—perhaps fortunately for Johnny—the lights of the great industrial city of Belfast.

A few months later, ten floors above the roaring canyon of Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Johnny McDade was demonstrating to a packed audience the art of weaving linen on a hand-loom. Shaded lights suspended from the superstructure of the loom blazed down upon the web of brown cloth already woven, on the complicated Jacquard harness, on the shuttle that slid to and fro like a startled fish, on Johnny McDade's bald head where he sat like an organist, wrapped in the mysteries of his art. Johnny, in fact, was in the spotlight, playing a new outlandish form of Wurlitzer; the audience stood in the shadows beyond the circle of light, pressing against the rope that surrounded the demonstration area, while beyond them loomed shadowy walls draped with the subdued brilliance of flags, amongst which the Stars and Stripes and the green flag of Ireland, decorated with a gold harp but minus a crown, predominated. Against this background stood a statue of Lafayette, faced by a bust of Daniel O'Connell—the sole statuary I had been able to borrow from the art department of Messrs. Klein & Seager Inc. What Lafayette was doing in that gallery I was not very sure, but I had read enough American history to know that, in spite of wars to end wars and the disillusionment that followed when the allies really came face to face in Paris, Lafayette was always a safe card to play, especially when united in the bonds of symbolical matrimony with *la belle* Kathleen Ni Houlihan. Effete but charming Europe was here seen demonstrating one of its ancient, complicated handicrafts in a setting of light and shade and colour that would have done credit to the late Mr. Ziegfeld himself. Indeed with the creation of this tableau I felt I had begun to deserve well of my country.

Johnny McDade, on the other hand, was not so sure: In the first place, as a technician, he objected to the battery of shaded lights with which I had flooded the show piece of my exhibition; the heat of the lamps snapped the yarn already rendered brittle by the dry, exciting American climate. In the second place, as an Orangeman, he objected to the bust of Daniel O'Connell.

"Mon," he said, rubbing his chin at the sight of it, "if yer father seen you, he'd massacre ye!"

"Not he," I said. "Not if it helps to sell his linen."

And as I was aware of aspects of my father's life and character of which Johnny remained respectfully innocent; as, furthermore, I was Johnny's sole bulwark against this strange and frightening continent on which he found himself, Johnny was forced to hold his tongue. As Johnny was only too gratefully aware, it was I who, penetrating the mysteries of the American banking system, paid him his augmented wages every Saturday; I who had extricated him from the luxurious hotel in which we had stayed on our first arrival in Philadelphia; I who had found him lodgings with Ulster exiles from his own beloved county of Armagh. Johnny had hated the hotel, with its elevators, its thickly-

carpeted corridors, its hot-house temperature, its obsequious bell-boys; in fact, he had nearly died of thirst in one of its bedrooms rather than risk an encounter with its telephone system.

Now everything was changed. Now Johnny went home in the evenings on a street-car to sit about in his shirt-sleeves in a sitting-room lit by bridge-lamps, to smoke his host's cigars, to spit in a cuspidor, and crack to his heart's content with exiles just as ready as himself to swop lies about the grand times they all had in Ireland. The only thing that worried him was the weather; it was already November and the tingling American frosts combined with the overheated atmosphere of Messrs. Klein and Seager's store to keep him in continual trouble with the loom. The yarn kept snapping, and as the best "waver" in the county Armagh, a man with a reputation to maintain, he could not bring himself to accept my realistic view of the situation.

"Just give her a bang now and then to keep the crowd round," I would say. "Sure they wouldn't know a loom from a sewing-machine. All we want is the crowd."

But Johnny did not approve. Working away at the brittle warp with his long brushes and evil-smelling concoctions, he would shake his head in doubt. I was becoming too much of a show-man for his taste; in fact, he once went so far as to say with an air of contempt, "Mon, ye'd make the quare shopboy!" At afternoon sessions, when the swarms of fashionably-dressed women wandering through the apparently endless departments of Messrs. Klein and Seager were at their thickest, I would arrive after a cup of coffee in Messrs. Klein and Seager's sumptuous restaurant, and talk, as Johnny expressed it, "to bate the band." Standing in the circle of light by the loom and searching the rows of ghostly white faces in the shadows between me and the flag-draped walls, I would deliver a series of short sermons on the history of the Irish linen industry, while Johnny, seated at his instrument like an organist waiting for his cue, his bald head shining under the shaded lights, would gaze at me with mingled disapproval and astonishment. So the loom was exactly the same in principle as those that had woven fine linen for the Pharaohs—barring the Jacquard machines that produced the pattern! Man, that just showed you what a fine thing education was when a young fella like myself who knew damn all about it could talk like that to the crowd. And cambric as fine as any that could be woven to-day had been found wrapped round the bodies of Egyptian princesses who died centuries before the dawn of the Christian era! Boys, I could hear Johnny saying to himself, that was a powerful thought. He must remember to tell them about that one when he got back to Annatravil.

And so on down through the centuries to William III (at which point Johnny always sat up and took notice) and the arrival of the Huguenots in Ireland. This historical introduction was, how-

ever, only jam for the fact-loving American public; the pill (what Johnny called the "shopboy" part!) came at the end, coated with the interesting information, thrown in absent-mindedly, as a kind of postscript or afterthought, that the sheets, towels, damask tablecloths, napkins, etc., manufactured in our hand and power-loom (trade mark an Irish harp surrounded by a garland of flowering flax) would be found exhibited—not, of course, with a view to sordid commerce, but merely as objects of romantic and educational interest—in the household linen and white goods department of Messrs. Klein and Seager Inc., three floors down, elevator No 6 . .

But Johnny never listened to the advertising part. Once the part about William III was over he always started fidgeting with the loom. And when the talk was all finished and the loom running *clack-bang, clack-bang, clack-bang*, there was usually a rapt, far-away expression on his face—like that of an artist lost, and well content to be lost, in the mysteries of his art. Every little sound in that loom had a meaning for Johnny, and sometimes, quite unconsciously, he talked to it as if it were a living thing.

The last time I saw him, he was, to paraphrase the old song, back from Philadelphia in the evening. It was springtime and in the distance the lough shone like silver. I got out of the car and walked up the path to the door. Again the *clack-bang* of the loom stopped before I got there, and Johnny appeared, struggling into his boots.

"Is that yerself?"

But Johnny's grip was not as firm as it once had been and Johnny's face was a shade of ashen grey. He stood in his shirt-sleeves, one shaking hand resting on the half-door.

"There's something wrong wi' the world," he said. "There'll never be the likes o' the ould times when yer father was alive. No, nor men like him neither."

"Ah, now, Johnny," I said, "things are not as bad as all that. You'll weave many a web yet. Why," I said, when Johnny shook his head, "one of these fine days we'll have you back in America."

But Johnny, shrunken, peering with difficulty at the fresh green fields and the hard white light of the spring, was not so sure. He shook his head mournfully. The old days were gone and the creatures walking the earth hardly men at all.

"They wouldn't know a dacent web o' cloth from a pollan net," he said with a flash of his old self. In the distance Lough Neagh shone like a dazzling sheet of silver. Johnny shaded his eyes.

"Well, God be wi' ye," he said at parting, "for the sake o' the ould times!"

I wrung his withered hand and walked down the path again to the car. Behind me Johnny stood leaning on the half-door, watching me depart. And maybe he was right about the old times, because, had I known it at that moment, Death stood just behind

him, staring over his shoulder. The web he was working on remained half woven, though he made valiant efforts to finish it, and less than a month from the day I said good-bye to him the *clack-bang* of his loom was silent for ever.

BASIL PAYNE



PROMETHEUS

An angry seagull with a raucous voice
Screamed his indignant disappointment
At six o'clock this morning, when he found
The object he'd mistaken for a crust
Was but a white mark on my window sill.
And as he paused, too proud to fly away
Immediately, no spoils to brag about,
We eyed each other, silently.
He, alert and poised,
But with defiance in his beady eyes;
And I, still dim-eyed, glazed with sleep,
Admiring (half-grudgingly, because he woke me up)
His shell-white, glossy breast,
Smooth and immaculate
As nun's starched linen.
Suddenly, with a short, derisive yell,
A great, disdainful flap of outstretched wings,
Swift as a guiltless soul, he sped
Into the turquoise chastity
Of early-morning skies.
Then, with a sigh I turned upon my side,
And parachuted gently
Back to the hooded safety of sleep.

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Grey rain was falling from a ragged sky
When I awoke.

H. O. WHITE

JOHN MILLINGTON SYNGE

(A talk broadcast by the B.B.C. on the Northern Ireland Home Service and later re-broadcast on the Third Programme).

SYNGE died forty years ago.

The thought sends my mind back to the Dublin of my student days, where one had something of the feeling of living in the Elizabethan age. One never knew what poet or dramatist one might not see in a walk down Grafton Street; and then there was the Abbey Theatre in the first flush of its glory, with superb actors, and all the intoxication of its new and wonderful plays.

I never met John Millington Synge. I saw him one night in the Abbey Theatre about a year before his death. I can still recall vividly that strange face, with its granite features that might have been quarried out of the Wicklow hills, deeply furrowed with lines of suffering and self-control.

Men's ends shape themselves strangely out of their beginnings. Synge is a case in point. He was born near Dublin in 1875, the youngest of a family of five. His father died when he was a year old. He grew up a very solitary boy, intensely interested in birds, wandering through the wildest parts of Wicklow in his holidays, till the glens and mountains and the face of Calargy bog grew as familiar as the palm of his hand. He did nothing very remarkable in Trinity College. He won a prize in Irish, and another, oddly enough, in Hebrew; and when he left us with a pass degree, no one suspected that we would be one day proud to number him among our great dramatists, beside Congreve, Farquhar, Goldsmith and Wilde. The wander years began; first music and Germany; then, after two years, his purpose changed; he turned to literature, and for five years, mostly in Paris, he sought, not very successfully, to become a critic. He had not yet found himself; perhaps he never would have found himself, if Yeats had not chanced upon him in the Hotel Corneille in 1899, and sent him back to Aran to live among the people, and express a life that had never found expression. Back in Dublin, Yeats said triumphantly to a friend of mine, —'I have found a young man in Paris who is an extraordinary genius.'

Synge, who had already been in Aran, revisited the islands in five successive autumns, finding there, as he tells us in a beautiful volume of prose studies which is the seed-bed of most of his plays,

'people whose lives have the strange quality that is found in the oldest poetry and legend.' He delighted in them, because of their almost childlike simplicity of nature, in which the primitive passions and instincts express themselves directly, and with a dignity which is lost in the vulgarity of towns. He became in short a sort of twentieth century Wordsworth, but with a closer contact with the peasant than, one suspects, Wordsworth ever had. These people lived in toil and hardship, and in continual danger from the sea. And the islands had, as he says, 'the desolation that is mixed everywhere with the supreme beauty of the world.'

That is one of the keys to Synge. Desolation and beauty he finds wedded together in nature and in life. So none of his comedies is pure comedy; there is an undercurrent of ironic tragedy in every one of them; but there is beauty also; and joy; and a harsh, extravagant humour. This continual opposition of irreconcilable elements would appear to proceed from some deeply-seated disharmony in his nature, and would repay closer analysis; but it is interesting to observe that Synge was in process of escaping from it in the last of his plays, as we shall see presently.

The setting of most of his plays is bleak and bare; a wild part of the coast of Mayo; a lonely Wicklow glen; Aran itself. The tragic undertone is an echo of the scene. In violent contrast is the comedy of situations; the intensely vivid life of the people and the rich colour of their speech.

The situation in the first of his comedies, *The Shadow of the Glen*, is the traditional farcical one of the young wife, the old husband, and the lover. Synge gives it an original twist, setting it in a lonely Wicklow glen, and turning the domestic triangle into a square by adding a romantic young tramp. The play for all its undertone of tragedy is extremely funny. Comedy is provided by the husband, who pretends to be dead, in order to spy on his wife, and who comes to life only to turn her out of the house at the point of his blackthorn. But there is tragedy in the fate of Nora, driven out by her surly old husband, and going off with a young tramp whom she has never seen before. No summary however can give an impression of the astonishing beauty of the dialogue, nor of the poetry that is in almost every speech.

In his book, *The Aran Islands*, Synge describes the wild display of grief at the funeral of a young man, and tells how the same evening he watched eight of his friends fishing with a drag-net.

'I could not help feeling I was talking with men who were under judgment of death. I knew that every one of them would be drowned in the sea in a few years and battered naked on the rocks, or would die in his own cottage and be buried with another fearful scene in the graveyard I had come from.'

This passage, and certain others in the same book, lie at the back of his Aran tragedy, *Riders to the Sea*, in which there are but two characters that matter, the old woman, Maurya, who has lost her six sons, one after another, by drowning, and the sea itself; so

that she cries out at the end—

'They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me.'

Synge is a realist, and his supreme interest as a dramatist is in life itself. He cared very little about politics; the dismal science of the economist did not concern him; he hated the drama of ideas, and thought it one of the curses of the modern theatre; and a sure instinct sent him back to the Elizabethans and to Molière for models. There were even aspects of the Irish literary movement with which he had little sympathy. He turned his back on the fairy world and the melancholy glamour of the Celtic twilight, for he had found a more desolate reality among the rocks of Aran, and he does not conceal his scorn in a little poem written after looking at one of Æ's pictures.

'Adieu, sweet Angus, Maeve, and Fand,
Ye plumed yet skinny Shee,
That poets played with hand in hand
To learn their ecstasy.

We'll stretch in Red Dan Sally's ditch,
And drink in Tubber fair,
Or poach with Red Dan Philly's bitch
The badger and the hare.'

He has been blamed because he nowhere attempts an exact realism of speech, and because he uses the same dialect forms for Wicklow and Aran. His haunting poetic speech rhythms, strongly influenced by Gaelic, have we are told no parallel in any dialect, and indeed they troubled the Abbey players at first, until they found the lilting tunes that suited them. These accusations do not disturb me very profoundly. All I know and care is that Synge, using the freedom of a great artist, created for himself out of the materials of folk speech a new medium of dramatic expression, flexible, richly coloured, and exquisitely subtle, that is a perpetual delight to the ear.

Synge's characters live a rich imaginative life. It blazes a trail of colour across his plays, which burn with a flare of vivid imagery and splendid speech. It crops up in the most unexpected places, and bursts often from the oddest people, and always there is startling dramatic effectiveness between the mediocrity of their condition and the magnificence and richness of their imaginative world.

'In Ireland,' Synge writes, 'we have a popular imagination that is fiery, and magnificent, and tender.' And again, of the *Play-boy*, 'the wildest sayings and ideas in this play are tame indeed compared with the fancies one may hear in any little hillside cabin.'

So, in *The Tinker's Wedding* there is a drunken old woman of deplorable character who is full of porter, and wants an audience to listen to her stories—

'I wouldn't have you lying down and you lonesome to sleep this night in a dark ditch when the spring is coming in the trees; so let you sit down there by the big bough, and I'll be telling you the finest story you'd hear any place from Dundalk to Ballinacree, with great queens in it, making themselves matches from the start to the end, and they with shiny silks on them the length of the day, and white shifts for the night.'

But the young tinker and his girl will not listen, and go off to rob a hen-roost, while she is left lamenting—

'What good am I this night, God help me? What good are the grand stories I have, when it's few would listen to an old woman, few but a girl maybe would be in great fear the time her hour was come, or a young child wouldn't be sleeping with the hunger on a cold night?'

Of course the supreme example of this poetic splendour is the great love scene in *The Playboy of the Western World*, which is undoubtedly the finest of Synge's plays. It is too long to quote, but listen to this—

'If the mitred bishops seen you, they'd be the like of the holy prophets, I'm thinking, do be straining the bars of paradise to lay eyes on the lady Helen of Troy, and she abroad, pacing back and forward, with a nosegay in her golden shawl.'

I have spoken of the sharp contrast between the poverty of the lives of Synge's characters and the richness of their speech, but there is a more important contrast still. For the grim irony of Synge's comedy depends on the contrast between their imagination, so highly coloured, so full of poetic splendour and invention, and the continual frustration and disillusionment they suffer. So poor Pegeen Mike cries out through her sobs at the end of the play—
'O my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only Playboy of the western world.'

What is it, in point of fact, that she has lost and is lamenting so heart-brokenly? Not Christy Mahon, the new pot-boy in her father's pub, who has turned out a rather ordinary person in the end; what she has lost is a romantic murderer who had split his father's head open with a loy, out of whom she and the villagers have made a hero, a gay and gallant figure of romance; she has lost an illusion, a vision, an impossible dream, born out of her bright imagination, and she is left with nothing better than the tame reality of her undervitalised weakling of a lover, Shawn Keogh.

And the two blind beggars in *The Well of the Saints* are happy indeed at the beginning in the belief that they are handsome and fair to look upon. But when the Saint comes and performs a miracle restoring their sight, they are miserable in the horrid reality of discovering that they are old and wrinkled and ugly. When in the third act their sight fails them, they are happy again, and begin reconstructing a world of fantasy once more. When the

saint returns they refuse a second miraculous healing. They are better as they are.

So the delight in love or in beauty is continually frustrated, or flung into bitter contrast with the sad reality of experience, and it is this perpetual frustration of happiness that constitutes the tragic undertone of Synge's art. It sprang no doubt from the deep well of compassion in his nature, about which Yeats has written so finely, but also, as I have hinted earlier this evening, from his personal experience of life. A careful scrutiny of his very revealing poems would seem to confirm this. It was a phase out of which he was already passing when he died. Yeats had suggested to him the subject of his *Dierdre of the Sorrows*. In this, his last play, he turns away from the modern peasant comedy to the world of heroic romance. The old bitterness of irony is gone. Love is no longer a matter of disillusionment and frustration; and the last act, which is the only part that had received his final touches, is a hymn of love's triumph and fulfilment.

It is idle to speculate on what Synge would have given us had he lived. He was beginning to explore a new field in *Dierdre of the Sorrows*. I know of no story more moving than that of Synge struggling through his last illness to finish this play, losing courage at times, and then finding fresh heart when his young sweetheart, a brilliant player in the Abbey, acted bits of it at his bed-side. There was something heroic in this strange solitary man. In the presence of such valour the best commentary is silence.

He is certainly the greatest dramatist that the Abbey Theatre has given us. He has no followers and he founded no school, but his example gave bone and sinew to the movement. His strange harsh vivid genius stands alone in the solitude of its greatness.

It is fitting, I think, that Yeats, who helped so much to make him an artist, should have the last word:

'And that enquiring man John Synge comes next
Who dying chose the living world for text
And never could have rested in the tomb
But that, long travelling, he had come
Towards nightfall upon certain set apart
In a most desolate stony place,
Towards nightfall upon a race
Passionate and simple like his heart.'

R. M. FOX

YEATS AND SOCIAL DRAMA

IRELAND'S contribution to world drama is comparatively recent. Not until Yeats and his associates began those activities which led to the establishment of the Abbey Theatre can Irish drama be said to have made its mark. This movement, at the turn of the century, was linked with a resurgence of National feeling which found expression in plays by Yeats, Alice Milligan and Douglas Hyde. Yet the Abbey Theatre itself rose almost accidentally. Without the generosity of Miss Horniman of the Manchester Repertory Theatre it might not have been possible. Yeats himself—so Lady Gregory has said—only wanted to establish a small theatre near London where verse plays could be performed. Even when the Irish dramatic movement was launched he relied, at first, upon English actors and aimed at London production. This was before the Abbey Theatre came into being. Although he had that early interest in the theatre, he was not primarily concerned with the drama as an expression of Irish life.

Yeats' first play, that nostalgic *Land of Heart's Desire* was produced in London at J. T. Grein's Independent Theatre in 1894. This theatre was an offshoot of the Ibsen movement which was then struggling to free the stage from bombast and empty rhetoric. Social criticism had begun its assault on those plays of courtly inanity that were characteristic of the sawdust and tinsel era. The managers of the conventional theatres were scandalised when Ibsen brought live, modern issues on to the stage. George R. Sims—a prolific and popular publicist who backed the conventional theatre—expressed contempt for the new movement and challenged any of its supporters to write a play as good as the current box office success. George Moore took up this challenge and wrote *The Strike at Arlingford* which was in theme and treatment part of the new Naturalistic drama. This deserves to be recalled because Moore helped Yeats in the early days of the Irish dramatic movement though he was never a formative influence.

Although Ibsen wrote poetic plays with their roots in history and legend he became known for his plays of social controversy which attacked nineteenth century conventions and made the stage a storm centre of ideas. Friends and enemies seized upon these plays and he became known as the social dramatist while the other side of his work was largely ignored. Following his lead Shaw, in Britain, made the drama a vehicle of social thought as

did Galsworthy and others. On the Continent, Brieux, in France, followed the Ibsen pattern of social indictment while Chekov, in such plays as *The Cherry Orchard* holds up the mirror to an aimless, stagnant society. Gerhardt Hauptmann in Germany worked in the same field. In the Berlin People's Theatre I saw his play *The Rats* dealing with the city slum life. He brought an old-time pompous actor-manager on to the stage who maintained that to have great tragedy you must have great names and titles—lords and princesses. Hauptmann then goes on to reveal a great tragedy in which the charwoman who is scrubbing out the theatre is the central figure.

Though Yeats admired Ibsen's work in liberating the stage, he had no sympathy whatever with the Ibsen social drama. One of the earliest conflicts in the Abbey Theatre movement was that between Yeats and Edward Martyn when Martyn attempted, in his *Tale of a Town*, to apply the Ibsen measure to Irish civic life. In this play Martyn wanted to give expression to Irish middle class activities but Yeats was adamant. He expressed his contempt for plays dealing with "town councils and drains" so Martyn, like George Moore, was lost to the Abbey Theatre movement. In his journal *Samhain*, Yeats formulated his ideas of Irish drama in opposition to those who wanted to write in the Ibsen manner. He wrote (in 1900), "I hope to get our heroic age into verse. . . . It is possible that we may have to deal with passing issues until we have re-created the imaginative tradition of Ireland and filled the popular imagination of Ireland again with saints and heroes."

Speaking of Ibsen as "the one great master the modern stage has produced," he went on to recommend Ibsen's romantic plays for study by Irish dramatists. Yet, in a later issue of *Samhain*, he asks; "Is he not a good deal less than the greatest of all time because he lacks beautiful and vivid language." Affirming the need for an aristocratic ideal, Yeats did not want drama to deal with the "average man" who, he said, was "average because he has not attained to freedom." Following these reflections Yeats outlined the character of the new Irish drama in these words: "Will not our next art be rather of the country, of great open spaces, of the soul rejoicing in itself? Will not the generations to come, begin again to have an over-abounding faith in kings and queens, in masterful spirits, whatever names we call them by?" It was not golden crowns or rich cloaks that caught Yeats' imagination but kingly qualities. Like A.E., he believed that men should be able to live their lives in a grand manner, without pettiness or sycophancy.

The Irish theatre—in the Yeatsian view—had two main tasks. It had to deal (1) with the life of the people of the fields and (2) to be "about the people of romance or about great historical people." Under his influence the Irish theatre turned away from the drama of the cities and of the drawing room, from the

'modern drama of society' as conceived by Ibsen. Rejecting the road constructed by Ibsen, the road of social drama, he set out to beat a field path through the Irish brambles that would lead to remote villages where rural life was uncorrupted, and to the still more remote past where the ancient glories of the legends still lingered. So if we wish to discover the essential contribution which the Irish theatre has made to the world we will find in it Yeats' decision to go to the ancient legends and to the life of the fields. Distinctive plays have been written but, because of the early limitations imposed, Ireland has remained weak in social drama and has little to put alongside the tremendous work which Continental, English and American dramatists have accomplished.

From the beginning there was no difficulty in establishing rural drama. But very early there was conflict over putting the legends on the stage. Standish O'Grady was horrified at the idea. "The Red Branch ought not to be staged," he cried indignantly in his *All-Ireland Review*. "Leave the heroic cycles alone and don't bring them down to the crowd." This roused the democratic feeling of A.E. who had written his own heroic play *Deirdre* and he countered with the assertion that the legendary heroes belonged to the whole people and not to any exclusive section.

"The wild riders have gone forth," A.E. declared, "and their labours in the human mind are only just beginning. They will do their deeds over again and now they will act through many men and speak through many voices. The spirit of Cuchulain will stand at many a lonely place in the heart and he will win, as of old, against multitudes."

This controversy should be recalled if only to indicate the heroic note that was sounded at the inception of Irish drama, though much of the argument now seems unreal and to belong to the period of growing pains. Yeats never succeeded in founding a school of heroic drama but the peasant play was firmly rooted, giving the Irish stage a pronounced anti-modern slant, evident in the antagonism which such plays as Thornton Wilder's *Skin of our Teeth* aroused.

We have glanced at the theory of Irish drama, the ideas which Yeats and the others propounded. We can look now at the actual drama. Yeats succeeded in getting the heroic note into his *Countess Cathleen* and in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. The peasant drama owed much to Lady Gregory, Padraic Colum, J.M. Synge and a host of others, extending to George Shiels and T. C. Murray in our own time. It may with justification be said that the Yeatsian view of drama corresponded roughly with the Irish realities of his day. The whitewashed cabin at the gate of the big estate was one of the fundamental realities. Through the great iron gates, the gentry might come riding, going past the hall-door of the dark den, like some heroic figures out of Ireland's legendary

past. This was a basis upon which a poetic imagination could easily create the kind of dream that Yeats felt was necessary. The Irish middle-class—about whose activities Edward Martyn wanted to write—counted for very little. They were not then important in the social scheme. The Ibsen drama of “town councils and drains” dealing with the striving industrial civilisation outside Ireland had little place in the stagnant, undeveloped Ireland of fifty years ago. And a play about drains was certainly superfluous so far as the cabins were concerned. This heroic drama accepted and, in a measure, glorified those static figures in Irish life—the toil-worn labourer and the carefree aristocrat. A whole comic literature had been built up out of the misfortunes of the Irish labourer and it seems only just that it should spill over on to the stage. Through the heroic drama, however, there did sound a note of national revolt. None of the devotees of “Art for Art’s sake” can deny the value to the resurgent National movement of such plays as *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*.

After 1916 and especially after 1922, a new critical realistic spirit entered the Irish theatre. It was not only that so many felt the bitterness of disillusion when they cashed in their poetic dreams of freedom at the National counter. The prosperous, practical men of affairs, belonging to the new, energetic middle class in control, no longer wanted romantic dreams though they might still go to the theatre occasionally to gaze with condescending indulgence at the familiar drama of rural life. There was no criticism in this and it could only feed their sense of self-importance. It was Sean O’Casey—the voice of tenement disillusion—who expressed a new phase of Irish drama. It had bitterness as well as humour and could still rise to poetic heights as in the valedictory speech of Juno. A realistic note of another kind was also found in the work of Lennox Robinson in his studies of the Protestant middle class and the shrunken gentry. He expressed much that was foreign to the older, romantic, peasant-aristocrat fixation, even though there seems to be a touch of regret at the passing of the Big House—Mud Cabin social order. Younger dramatists have also helped to widen the scope and change the spirit of Irish drama. Yeats himself—in his later poetry more than in his plays—struck a new note of realism.

Denis Johnston’s *The Moon in the Yellow River* might almost be regarded as a documentary of the period of transition for he presents in stark conflict, the romantics who cling to the fading glory of the old Celtic twilight and the moderns who accept the Shannon Power era with all its crudity. The final scene in this play when the poet is shot because he stands in the way of industrial progress may perhaps be taken as a symbol of the fate of that old romantic drama which proved so unfitted to express the needs and the passion of the New Ireland on the stage.

Every age must get its own expression in literature, in the arts,

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in drama. Ireland tends to live in the past so far as drama is concerned. A drama that was suited to a time when the national development had been thwarted and checked is obviously not the kind of drama needed now when a spurt is being made to catch up with industrial neighbours. When Ibsen asked his questions on the stage—in the form of questioning characters—he was dealing with just the kind of struggling, industrial society in its period of growth that we now have in Ireland. We want to know where we stand between the old gombeen man and the new merchant princes. We need an Ibsen or a Shaw to deal incisively with the human and social problems thrown up by these new conditions.

The emergence of the Gate Theatre in 1928 was a sign that the need for a new or wider approach in drama was being felt. The Edwards-MacLiammoir combination by bringing in plays from the Continent and from America—such as Capek's *R.U.R.* and many others—helped to re-adjust Ireland to modern drama just as the winning of national independence was re-adjusting the country, industrially and politically. Hilton Edwards and Michael MacLiammoir have not only helped by widening the dramatic perspective and bringing in plays from outside but MacLiammoir's own plays have a critical edge—along with their essentially Irish fantasy—that has advanced Irish drama. In MacLiammoir's work we have the ancient, moonlit legend combined with modern drawing room cynicism. He is a connecting link of transition and it is noticeable that though he began with the legends, his latest play *The Mountains Look Different* has a setting of contemporary life. Lord Longford, though his preference seems to be for classical and eighteenth century drama, occasionally gives us a play with a modern, critical approach. In *Yahoo*—his Swift play—he showed a man of genius whose mind was breaking under the strain of trying to drag Ireland forward while the submerged mass held it back.

It is significant that one of the most popular plays of the Gate Theatre was *Marrowbone Lane* by Dr. W. R. Collis, written to expose the housing and living conditions in the Dublin slums—a pure Ibsen theme. The reception given to this play indicated that audiences were ready for challenging plays on social matters. Always such plays have to meet the criticism that they bring unpleasant themes on the stage. This was said of Sean O'Casey. It has been repeated of Dr. Collis and, recently, it has been the basis for criticism of Michael MacLiammoir. Such objections belong to the "sweep the dirt under the sofa" school of criticism, a method as unsatisfactory in the theatre as it is in real life. Ibsen had to meet this objection too. Yet few will deny that social dramatists have helped to remedy evils by calling attention to them. And, strictly from the standpoint of drama, audiences were moved to a far greater extent when they felt that the dramatist was dealing with something real and pressing, not with old, unhappy, far-off things.

No one with a feeling for the stage would want to crush drama into one channel. Every dramatist sees life through his own temperament and his plays take the colour of his mind. Synge's poetic arabesques and fantasies were gorgeous dreams of undisciplined playboys loose in the fields. His *Riders to the Sea* was more severely realistic. O'Casey's playboys—loose in the Dublin tenements—were largely the shiftless debris of humanity. They were countrymen caught up and flung into the city where they remained unadjusted. They expressed, too, the human revolt against the sordidness of squalid city life. There is room for historical plays, for poetic drama, for daring experiments in Expressionist technique, irrespective of the content of the play. The Ibsen social content may be expressed in a more modern way. Our younger dramatists have carried out various experiments. Walter Macken in *Mungo's Mansion* wrote a play with a social theme bringing in rich Connemara characters who would have been at home in a Synge play. M. J. Molloy in *The Old Road* wrote a fantastic comedy with a background of emigration. Teresa Deevy is a very individual dramatist who draws her characters clearly. She owes something to the Ibsen technique and the emphasis she places on the breaking of bonds, on the desire for freedom, has an Ibsen ring. Bernard McGinn in *Remembered for Ever* and Gerard Healy in *The Black Stranger* each dealt in a bitter way with social and historical themes.

Yet, so far, in Ireland the early bias of the National theatre—re-inforced by arrested national development—has tended to exclude social drama, that drama which deals with the problems and conflicts of everyday social life. Yeats recommended rising dramatists to read Ibsen's romantic plays but this author's grappling with social problems is also well worth study. There is plenty of drama in Irish social life as will be evident when future social dramatists turn to this almost untouched field.

NOTE.—In the case of Mr. Fox's article I find myself in the position of not necessarily agreeing with all the views expressed by a distinguished contributor to the point of making an acknowledgement necessary. In his preoccupation with "social drama" Mr. Fox would seem to have been led to a more than generous estimate of the work of Galsworthy, Brieux, Maurice Collis, etc., and to a less than generous one of the work of Yeats. If it is true, as Mr. Fox states, that Yeats has little to give in dramatic example to the coming playwrights, one may ask oneself if they are any more likely to find sustenance in the work of Ibsen's middle-period to which he advises them to turn—work which is now generally acknowledged to have overshadowed the real importance of the Norwegian dramatist during his lifetime and for a period following his death.

TERENCE SMITH.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE GROWTH OF GENIUS

W. B. YEATS: MAN AND POET, BY NORMAN JEFFARES
(Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 21/-).

The word "important" has been worked to death in recent years. Any book that appeals to a reviewer is almost invariably described as important. Yet surely there should be severe limitations applied to the use of the word? First of all the subject matter should be of general interest, and then the writer must be an authority on his subject. Now both these factors enter into consideration in the book before us. W. B. Yeats, from being a Dublin celebrity has passed into international Literature, and any well-written study of his work might well be described as "important". But Dr. Jeffares has done a good deal more than write just another biography of Yeats the man, or Yeats the poet: He has attempted, and I think, succeeded in creating a convincing picture of the growth and development of "that queer thing, genius"—which cannot be done by the mere accumulation of facts, or by a critical analysis of a man's work.

From the start, Dr. Jeffares dwells on little points of the Yeatsian *anschauung*, or rather, insignificant traits and quirks of character which went to build up that *anschauung* in later life. And here he has grasped a very important secret: most men of genius have one-track minds, and return to, and repeat, in old age what has obsessed them in childhood. And the tracing and identifying of these *motifs* through a man's life and work can be one of the most fascinating aspects of the art of biography. Yet Dr. Jeffares never permits himself to stress any of these points unduly; the main story unfolds itself simply and unaffectedly; and the subtle observations to which I refer are lying there just beneath the surface, easy to find for those who want more than a plain tale.

There is drama in Dr. Jeffares' account of the emergence of W. B. from a period of vacillation, in a chapter so entitled, into the full glory of his "Byzantine" period, coinciding as it did with the decline and fall of Coole and all it had stood for:

Here, traveller, scholar, poet, take your stand
When all these rooms and passages are gone,
When nettles wave upon a shapeless mound
And saplings root among the broken stone,
And dedicate—eyes bent upon the ground,
Back turned upon the brightness of the sun
And all the sensuality of the shade—
A moment's memory to that laurelled head.

Yeats felt Lady Gregory's death and the passing of Coole keenly:

But all is changed, that high horse riderless,
Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood.

yet he went on from triumph to triumph in his craft. I have only touched on one of many skilful chapters: in another—"An Old Man's Eagle Eye", I came across an unforgettable self-portrait:

Infirm and aged I might stay
In some good company,
I who have always hated work
Smiling at the sea. . . .

Dr. Jeffares has given us a classic biography, unmarred by hero-worship, or its all too common opposite; there are 52 pp. of Notes and Bibliography, an Appendix and a splendid Index. Everyone interested in Yeats or the art of Biography should have this book.

CECIL FFRENCH SALKELD.

O'CASEY SAYS 'NO'

COCK-A-DOODLE DANDY, BY SEAN O'CASEY. (Macmillan 6/-).

It seems as though O'Casey, like so many other writers, will never escape from the reputation of his early work: the green flag has been wrapped around him with a vengeance. Public and critics continually demand another *Juno and the Paycock*, another *Plough and the Stars*—and O'Casey more and more shrilly says 'no'! Quite rightly, he refuses to plunder his early themes; whether he occasionally parodies his early style is another matter.

Now it seems that in *Cock-a-doodle Dandy* he has set out to vindicate the life-principle. There is a reaching-out to the sun and stars by his women characters; the men, for the most part, embody the death-principle as exemplified in censorship, timidity, meanness of spirit. Unfortunately, writing from a thesis, rather than directly and passionately from life, is an unsound procedure for a writer of O'Casey's cast of mind. (With an Aldous Huxley the matter is different). So in this play one has the impression too frequently that the men are straw-men, that the women are too aerial, too compound of sweetness and gaiety and sense. In a word, one wonders not only how much one believes in some of these characters but how much O'Casey himself believes in them.

All the same the play may be enjoyed as a piece of uninhibited farce. It is not for nothing that O'Casey is a great writer—and one sees his head from time to time pushing up for air through all the cardboard trappings. There are the old flashes now and then—touches of humour and tenderness to offset the sourness and rancour, airy phrases that lift up from the page. One regrets

that O'Casey insists on flogging certain horses that in this mid-century of ours are dead or dying, even in rural Ireland. When he emerges from this bitterly negative phase one may hope to see his genius exercise itself on themes more worthy of it than peasant superstition and clerical arrogance.

ROBERT GREACEN.

A MATTER OF FORM

POEMS 1943-47, BY C. DAY LEWIS. (*Cape*, 6/-).

ELEGIES FOR THE DEAD IN CYRENAICA, BY HAMISH HENDERSON. (*John Lehmann*, 6/-).

"Poetry," said Allen Tate, himself one of the half-dozen or so American poets of the present day, "is the art of apprehending and concentrating our experiences in the mysterious limitations of form." I remembered Mr. Tate's dictum when reading the two books at present under review because, for one reason, the question of *form* kept cropping up in my mind while I was reading them and, for another, they both might be said to represent opposite poles of experience.

Mr. Day Lewis deals with quiet, intimate things such as a very personal relationship between two persons, soft, nostalgic thoughts that occur to him when travelling, sitting on the sea wall or gazing at the Christmas tree; Mr. Henderson, a young Scottish poet, on the other hand, is concerned with more public problems ("the endless problem of how to safeguard our human house") and were written directly out of his experiences fighting in North Africa and Italy.

Both poets certainly apprehend their experiences: if they didn't they wouldn't be poets. Mr. Day Lewis concentrates his, but the same thing can hardly be said of Mr. Henderson who is far more spontaneous in his reactions and expressed his impressions while they were still red-hot. Mr. Henderson's method in this book may make for greater vividness for the reader but does it help the *poetry*? Is there an ultimate residue of poetry in his work? Reading this book—which, let me hasten to add, is very promising for Mr. Henderson's future—I couldn't help thinking of the cold voice of John Crowe Ransom pointing out that the most characteristic quality in modern poetry is spontaneity: "we have grown too impatient to relish more than the first motions towards poetic effect." It will be exceedingly interesting to see what Mr. Henderson makes of the less highly coloured and less highly pressurised life of routine peace-time, where the realisation of the significance of the small events of one's life is far more difficult.

What bothered me most in the case of both poets was the form in which their respective verses were cast. Does, in each case, the

form chosen—the verse-pattern, help the reader or does it get between the reader and his appreciation of the full significance of the poets' experiences? I rather thought that it did; the poems were not fully realised in the forms chosen.

In the case of Mr. Lewis this was a particularly serious fault because one felt that while his imaginative apprehension of his experiences was fully realised, one also felt that his use of these particular verse-forms was more self-conscious than natural. In other words, the reader was all the time conscious of the patterns; this tended to deflect his attention from the poetic meaning of the poet in almost every poem.

VALENTIN IREMONGER.

SELECTED POEMS, (with an introduction by T. S. Eliot,) By
EZRA POUND (*Faber*) 12/6.

THE PISAN CANTOS, BY EZRA POUND. (*Faber*) 12/6.

THE LABYRINTH, Poems, BY EDWIN MUIR. (*Faber*) 8/6.

Many consider Ezra Pound to be the father of modern poetry as we know it to-day—I exclude, of course, the 'new romanticism', which does not stand out to me as anything very definite. It is hard to place the author of these 'Selected Poems' and of the 'Cantos' in any category. The verse is various as to style and content, and he is always very much himself, even when echoing Browning, or quoting Dante, Confucius, Scotus Erigena, and the rest. Egypt, China, Spain—what country does he not fly over?

I am thy soul, Nikoptis . . .

See, I have left the jars sealed

And all thy robes I have kept smooth on thee.

"As for Cathay," writes Mr. Eliot in his Introduction, "it must be pointed out that Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time."

Everyone who cares for poetry is familiar with:

It rests me to converse with beautiful women
Even though we talk nothing but nonsense,
The purring of the invisible antennae
Is both stimulating and delightful.

or,

There died a myriad,
And of the best, among them,
For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
For a botched civilisation.

We are given a whole world in 'The Pisan Cantos'. The poem is a rich and varied tapestry: the texture firm and smooth, the design, for all its variations, a unity.

and there was a smell of mint under the tentflaps
especially after rain

Woven in among passionate argument and high-brow gossip about

IRISH WRITING

poet, painter and musician—(we have much about W. B. Yeats, and allusions to Joyce and Colum)—how pleasant, the recurring touches of landscape. . . The Moon, Cytherea the Potent—
O moon my pin-up,

chronometer

The to-and-fro of ant and butterfly. The spider that brings him luck. "The butterfly has gone out through my smoke hole."

The shadow of the tent's peak treads on its corner peg marking the hour. The moon split, no cloud nearer than Lucca.

I like best the tenderness with which Brother Wasp is described building his house.

and in the warmth after chill sunrise

an infant, green as new grass,

has stuck its head or tip

out of Madame La Vespa's bottle

"We who have passed over Lethe" . . . the phrase recurs.

When the mind swings by a grass blade

an ant's forefoot shall save you

the clover leaf smells and tastes as its flower

As a lone ant from a broken ant-hill

from the wreckage of Europe, ego scriptor.

Halfway through, we are given two pages of sad-sounding music, in an early mode, and several marginal decorations of Chinese letters charm the eye.

If the hoar frost grip thy tent

Thou wilt give thanks when night is spent.

Which means, I take it, that men are bettered by suffering. A book to have and to hold.

Little space remains for the consideration of Mr. Muir's much praised book. It contains a great deal of thought, and some beauty, as in the poem about a dying child:

Unfriendly, friendly universe,

I pack your stars into my purse,

And bid you, bid you so farewell.

That I can leave you, quite go out,

Go out, go out beyond all doubt,

My father says is the miracle.

The author is a sober poet, much preoccupied with time and death.

The opening lines of 'The Transfiguration' are noble music.

BLANAID SALKELD.

THE GAME COCK AND OTHER STORIES, BY MICHAEL MCLAVERTY (*Jonathan Cape*, 9/-).

A recent reviewer, in these pages, commented on the slowness of the Irish critics in recognising Michael McLaverty's real

worth. Now it seems that, with the publication of his latest collection of stories, this slowness has begun to disappear. So far, so good. But one wonders what proportion of the reading-public yet realises that Ireland has produced another great short-story writer. Perhaps the reason for any tardiness of response is due to McLaverty's style and approach. He is a writer whose intensity is all but passionless and whose greatest triumphs are achieved as a miniaturist. There is no excitement about the way he puts words together, no unnecessary frills, no individual trait. It is a pure, logical style that has about it an atmosphere of accumulated power. It feels right.

Most of his stories are about children, or about incidents and persons as seen through a child's eyes. Their characters are simple folk: farmers, school-kids, office-workers, lighthouse-keepers—all people drawn from the less privileged classes. Because their lives are so full and their struggles so demanding, events of great emotional disturbance have to be accommodated with the minimum of fuss and bother. The wheel keeps turning and their cultivated placidity of exterior is their defence against the trials of the daily round. Over-reflection, recriminations, and self-pity are luxuries they can ill-afford.

McLaverty is their humble and accurate chronicler; and as we read his stories we are drawn completely into the web he weaves and become identified, through him, with the boy, Colm, who is panicked by the fear that he has caused a wild duck to forsake its nest, with little Brendan who wanted only to prophecy the weather as his grandfather used, with eight-year old Terence Devlin who fell in love with a model schooner, and with Frankie whose big hero-brother kept pigeons. But this last is McLaverty at his best and its beginning must be quoted:

Our Johnny kept pigeons, three white ones and one brown one that could tumble in the air like a leaf. They were nice pigeons, but they dirtied the slates and cooed so early in the morning that my Daddy said that someday he would wring their bloody necks. That is a long while ago now, for we still have pigeons, but Johnny is dead; he died for Ireland.

That has the accent of truth and the stamp of greatness.

D.M.

NORTH LIGHT. Ten New One-Act Plays from the North. Compiled by WINNIFRED BANNISTER (*William MacLellan*, 8/6).

The one-act play has fallen into lean days in the commercial and not so commercial theatre, where, if it is produced at all, this perilous play-form in which so many masterpieces have been written, is dismissed as 'curtain-raiser'. Evidence that there is still room for it, presumably in the Little Theatre movement, is shown, however, by the publication of *North Light*, a collection of ten one-act plays. "This volume," says the editor, "is concerned with what might be called the Northern school, which takes in the north of England, Scotland and Ireland. . . . The south has a softer brand of sentiment than the north," and the main difference between the two is, in the editor's view, the difference between "light" and "warmth". It must be confessed that as we read the plays we are inclined to leave behind these rather arbitrary distinctions (what warmth in Maughan, Coward, Christopher Fry, for instance?) and we are just as likely to find that one of the most attractive elements in the best of them is a natural warmth of feeling.

Such is the case certainly with Neil Gunn's *Old Music*, a tender study of an old Highland woman's grief and resignation at the breaking-up of an ancient rural order—not through industrialization but through desertion. There is a Biblical poetry in this piece. In *The Failure* by Joe Corrie the emigration theme is more hopefully expressed. Here an old crofter fisherman, wishing his son to 'get on in life', has sent him to the city, but the son breaks with his father because with his whole being he wishes to stay in his native village: a sincere and moving play, as is also *Dog In The Manger* by W. Templeton Law, which takes us to the city, the scene being laid in a greyhound track. Perhaps the most interesting of the Scottish plays is, however, *The Carlin Moth*, an island fairy tale, by Robert MacLellan. This play is in verse and the speech is folk; to call it dialect might not be to suggest the limpid quality, the style and the charming naturalness of the verse. Winifred Bannister contributes *The Gov'ment Job*, a bright and most playable little farce, with a true feeling for character in the Yorkshireman, George, a stay-at-home, who longs for a holiday in London. Irish contributions are *Interlude* by Paul Vincent Carroll and *The End of the Beginning* by Sean O'Casey. Both of these plays reveal the master hand. Mr. Carroll turns his searchlight on a rural businessman, a local autocrat, while Mr. O'Casey brings relief after so much thoughtfulness in the other plays with a frankly slapstick, dionysiac piece. This play is certainly a reminder, if one was needed, of the lengths to which O'Casey can go in pure pantomime.

For many years now *Macmillan and Co., Ltd.* have had the honour to publish the works of authors distinguished in Irish Literature. Amongst those whose works have appeared under their imprint are William Butler Yeats, A. E., James Stephens, Katherine Tynan, Sean O'Casey, Lennox Robinson, Paul Vincent Carroll, Frank O'Connor, George Shiels, Louis Dalton, Teresa Deevy, and F. R. Higgins. In recent years, Macmillan and Co. have endeavoured to maintain the high literary quality of their Irish list by introducing to the public younger writers and poets—Patrick Kavanagh, Walter Macken, Bryan MacMahon, Vera Orgel.

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RICHARD ELLMANN

This brilliant analysis of Yeats' poetic and intellectual growth will be recognised as the most revealing yet to be written. Mr. Ellmann has been permitted to examine and use 50,000 pages of unpublished manuscript which the poet left at his death and he is able, in particular, to throw much new light on esoteric Yeatsism

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Here are some of our recent Irish publications: *Irish Miles*, a travel book (12s. 6d.) and *The Common Chord*, short stories (8s. 6d.), both by Frank O'Connor. *Life and the Dream*, by Mary Colum (15s.). *A Soul for Sale*, by Patrick Kavanagh (5s.). *The Lion Tamer*, and other stories, by Bryan MacMahon (8s. 6d.). Two plays—*Shadow and Substance* and *The Wise Have Not Spoken*, by Paul Vincent Carroll (8s. 6d.). *A New View of the Plays of Racine*, a scholarly book by Vera Orgel, lecturer in French at the University of Dublin (16s.). And finally, two plays and a novel by Walter Macken—*Mungo's Mansion* (5s.), *Vacant Possession* (6s.) and *Quench The Moon* (10s. 6d.).

Macmillan & Co., Ltd., St. Martin's Street, London, W.C.2

Side by side with the plays are attractive sketches for the settings, including some by Molly McEwen, whose work is known in this country.

T.S.

(In IRISH WRITING No. 10 L. A. G. Strong will commence a series of articles as resident critic. His first article will deal with the work of Padraic Colum.)

THE MONTH

NOVEMBER, 1949

THE DILEMMA OF IRISH LETTERS

by

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

- DESMOND CLARKE:** Born Dublin, 1907. His stories have appeared widely in Ireland and England, and he has two novels and a collection of stories awaiting publication. Is Librarian of the Royal Dublin Society.
- SEAMUS DE FAOITE:** Born Killarney, 1918. He is known as a writer and broadcaster in Ireland and has also had work published in America. His plays have been produced in Dublin, and also by Radio Eireann and the B.B.C. Is married, has two sons, and works on a Dublin daily newspaper.
- R. M. FOX:** Born Leeds, of Anglo-Irish parentage, and spent his early years in London. Took Diploma of Economics and Political Science at Oxford. Has published numerous books on economics and historical themes and has written dramatic criticism for Irish, English, American, and Continental journals.
- DENIS IRELAND:** Born Belfast, 1894. Educated at Academical Institution, Belfast; Perse School, Cambridge; Queen's University, Belfast. Served with the Irish Fusiliers in World War 1. Official of the B.B.C., and was nominated a Senator in 1948. Is the sole representative from Northern Ireland in the Oireachtas. Has published many books.
- TEMPLE LANE:** Family has been in Ireland for three hundred years. Educated at Sherborne Girls' School, England; Trinity College, Dublin; then on the Continent. Winner of the Tailteann Gold Medal with novel 'The Little Wood'. Poetry is her first love, prose an economic necessity. Has lectured and writes literary criticism. Published two volumes of verse and has a third in formation.
- PATRICIA LYNCH:** Born Cork City. Educated in Ireland, England, and Belgium. She is widely known for her imaginative Irish children's books. Has gained literary awards from the Tailteann Festival, Irish Women Writers' Club, and Eugene Field Society (U.S.A.) Her books have been translated into several languages and frequently serialised by the B.B.C.
- LOCHLINN MACGLYNN:** Born Donegal, 1916, and has had work previously published in Ireland.
- BASIL PAYNE:** Born Dublin, 1925. Has had stories and poems published by 'Irish Bookman', and other Irish magazines. Is an insurance official.
- PHILIP ROONEY:** Born Colloney, Co. Sligo, 1909. Educated at Mungret College, Limerick. Worked as a bank clerk before taking up writing as a whole time career. Has written many short stories and his novels have been published in Ireland, America, and Norway. Is Radio Critic for the 'Irish Press' and has another novel awaiting publication.

THE SACRED RIVER

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L. A. G. STRONG

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METHUEN

GEOFFREY TAYLOR: Born 1900. Educated in Ireland, England and at the Royal College of Science, Dublin. Was Literary Editor of 'The Bell' 1941-1945. Has published several books of poems.

H. O. WHITE: Born Co. Down, 1885. Educated at Trinity College, Dublin, where he has been Professor of English Literature since 1940. Has also taught at Queen's University, Belfast; Sheffield University; and Universidad Internacional de Santander.

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